

I. Introduction

- A. What is heaven and what difference does it make?
- B. That is the question we take up today as we draw FencePosts III to a close.
- C. This study – the devotionals, sermons, studies, and tonight’s lecture – have been focused on who we are, where we came from, what is expected of us, what is going to happen to us when we die and how we might be reconciled to God.
- D. The sermons have been based out of Genesis.
- E. The studies have been systematic in nature
- F. And the news has been mostly bad.
- G. Not entirely. There is good news throughout the Book, and as we saw last week – in Genesis 3 - it starts very early with the proto-evangelium.
 - 1. The promise of a redeemer – someone who will crush the head of the serpent.
- H. But the studies in particular – the notebook, with chapters on Sin and Evil, and then Death and Hell – have been focused on what went wrong and the trouble we are in.
- I. In today’s sermon we’re jumping to the end of The Book to look at heaven, doing so
 - 1. In an effort to answer the question, what happens when those who are in Christ – who have been redeemed – die.
 - 2. And to draw FP III to a close.
- J. My inability to finish the writing part of this project on time is now well know
 - 1. Some people can write clearly but not quickly.
 - 2. Some people can write quickly but not clearly.
 - 3. I, apparently, can do neither
- K. Today’s sermon, which is now posted online, is to be your guide. It contains a lot more material than I am able to preach, including small group discussion questions.
 - 1. It is my plan to finish FP III by writing up this last study.

2. And we plan to get finished hard copies out to you.
3. But for now this will have to do.

II. Well, heaven.

A. What is heaven?

B. How are we to think about it? Let me invite you to turn to our text for the day. It is found in the last book of the Bible – the Book of Revelation.

C. I will be reading Rev. 21:1 - 4 and then 9 through 22:5. Hear the Word of God.

D. 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. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And 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. ⁴He 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."

E. ⁹One 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." ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

F. ¹⁵The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶The 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 is long. ¹⁷He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

G. ²²I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The 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. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷Nothing 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.

H. ¹Then 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 ²down 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. ³No 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. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There 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 forever and ever.

III. I have preached on heaven before – never adequately. (To be honest, I'm not sure that is possible.)¹ But in those messages I have tried to convey to you what John tried to convey to us – namely, a vision of the place where the infinite God expresses himself infinitely.

A. Where God most fully makes known his presence to bless.²

B. In our text – Rev. 21:9 – John reports that an angel comes down to serve as his tour guide.

1. One of the 7 angels who had the 7 bowls full of the 7 last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 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.

C. And then John describes – or tries to anyway³ – what he saw.

¹ Tim Keller has noted that pastors feel particularly anemic on this topic. Jonathan Edwards makes the same point, describing Heaven and Hell as being essentially “unspeakable.” (Edwards comments on sermon on Ex. 9:12). Dane and Milton’s poetry has captivated millions for centuries. But what they write is not an adequate description of heaven.

² Grudem, *Doctrine*, p. 466.

³ Jonathan Edwards preached an entire sermon on the word “like” in the statement in Rev. 21, “pure gold ‘like’ clear glass.” He noted that we cannot say what heaven is, only what heaven is “like.”

D. This is the place where believers go to enter into the full enjoyment of life in the presence of God forever.

E. Jesus will say to us, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”⁴

IV. I have preached on heaven before. And in those previous sermons I have made a handful of observations about it.

A. For starters I’ve argued that heaven is a real place.⁵

1. Just as real and more permanent than the world we are in now

B. Secondly, I’ve argued that it is majestic and awe-inspiring. More spectacular than we can imagine

1. John’s description includes precious stones, pearly gates, the River of life and the throne of God.

2. It is a place where the radiance of His glory drives out all darkness.

a) There are no sources of light other than God’s glory – but that glory is dazzling and it is non-stop. Nothing can eclipse it. There is no night.

3. John describes thick, towering walls, indicating safety and order.

⁴ Matthew 25:34.

⁵ Heaven is not a state of mind, a metaphor or an ethereal, mystical never-never land that is here and there and nowhere all at the same time. It is a real place. The promise we are given is that at the time of our death our body goes into the ground but our soul goes to be with Christ or to a place of suffering. But that at the end of the age our bodies will be resurrected and reunited with our souls – and from that point on we will always have a physical body. The tomb was empty because Christ’s body – not just his soul, but his body – rose from the dead. It was slightly transformed – not everyone recognized him immediately and he had the ability to move through walls – but it was material. He ate fish and had them touch him in order to prove it. When he later ascended into heaven it was with a real, physical body. In, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Heaven But Were Afraid To Ask*, Peter Kreeft writes: I’m capitalizing the H in heaven just like I capitalize the C in Chicago and the T in Timbuktu because heaven is a real place. In fact, it’s more real than Chicago or Timbuktu, because in a million years there will not be a Chicago, but there will be a heaven. D. L. Moody went so far as to say that heaven is just as real as New York or Chicago. In fact, it is more real because in 1,000 years it’s doubtful that those places will still be around, but heaven will be. And the Bible reinforces that kind of thinking. The contrast between heaven and earth always finds earth described as unstable, fleeting, insecure and temporal and heaven as a secure, stable, eternal and physical place.

4. And in so many ways he assures us that it is clean and beautiful.
5. It is described as a place of abundant food, splendid clothes, delightful music.⁶
6. A place so far beyond what we now know that one of our most precious commodities is used to pave the streets
7. Heaven is majestic. It is beyond our comprehension. John can't say much more than he says.⁷

C. I have gone on to argue that heaven is the fullest realization of our life-long goal of being whole people

1. Of being satisfied
2. And of being so completely enraptured in the presence and glory of God that we become self-forgetful.⁸

D. Fourthly, in previous sermons on heaven I have made much of John's use of the name, the New Jerusalem, because of the power that would have to his hearers.

1. When you read the Bible you need to ask yourself, "What would the first readers have understood by what is being conveyed here?"

⁶ Given the generally luxury most of us enjoy the descriptions found here have lost a bit of their punch. We need to realize the contrast that is intended. Heaven is safe and orderly – not the threatening chaos that has characterized so much of human civilization. Heaven is clean and beautiful – not like the places of squalor so many have lived in for so long. Heaven is filled with abundant food, splendid clothes, delightful music and running water – it is not a place of pain and need such as many endure. In heaven we will be free from pain and worry. There will be no more conflict, wars or crimes. No temptation, trials or trouble. Heaven is even described as a place of sweet smells, which might strike us as odd, until we remember what most of the world has smelled like for most of history. (See John Stackhouse, *Harley's in Heaven*, *Christianity Today*, June 2003, p. 40).

⁷ As a rule I try to keep expectations in check so as not to be disappointed later on. I don't want to over-expect. That is not possible when it comes to heaven. Paul tells us that, "No eyes have seen, or ears heard, or mind conceived of what God has prepared for those who love Him." (I Corinthians 2:9)

⁸ In *Mere Christianity* Lewis suggests that the ecstasy of heaven will be "pure self-forgetfulness." He describes this state – which he argues is the exact opposite of our earthbound nature – as being filled with goodness; but, he continues, the redeemed "do not call it goodness....They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes" (p.131). Kreeft makes a similar point. He argues that in the ecstasy of self-forgetfulness after death, the redeemed are "ravished even further: not only out of our bodies but out of our souls, our selves. Heaven is [totally] self-forgetful" (p.112).

2. And when you read the Book of Revelation – the 66th book in the Bible – you need to do so in light of the previous 65.⁹
 3. If you did that then the City of Jerusalem would jump out at you.
 4. You'd understand that, even though Americans are not all that tied to the land.
 - a) Not all of that loyal to a city or a state
 5. The Jews were. And they loved Jerusalem. They were fanatical about it.
 6. John is writing for people for who Jerusalem the place they long to be.
 - a) It's linked to their best memories
 - b) It's part of their identity.
 - c) It's home.¹⁰
 7. The suggestion that Heaven would be a new, remade Jerusalem would have been great news.
- E. In previous messages on heaven I have talked about these points and several others, and generally complained that we do not think about it often enough.
1. Not nearly like we used to.¹¹ Not nearly like we should.¹²

⁹ You especially need to read the Book of Revelation in light of John's four previous books. If you do the references to a River of living water (Rev. 22) will not only take you back to the Garden of Eden, but will also remind you of the conversation Christ had with the Samaritan woman, to whom he promised water that would free her from ever thirsting again.

¹⁰ Americans have become pretty mobile, but many people – including, perhaps especially the Jews – have a strong affinity for a particular location. For the Jews of John's day, Jerusalem was home base. It was the place where every Jew always wanted to be. When they were in captivity, they longed for it. When they took a trip, they spoke about it – the promised land. The standard line for a Jew at Passover is to say, "Next year in Jerusalem." In Psalm 137:5 we read: If I forget you, Oh, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you. If I do not exalt you above my chief joy." To a Jew, Jerusalem was like home, only better. And so, when John says, "I saw heaven" – and he uses the word "New Jerusalem" to describe it – he is saying, "It's like going home."

¹¹ If people are preparing for a trip – especially one they are looking forward to – they tend to talk about it. In the past Heaven came up in normal conversations more frequently than it does now. In fact, you cannot read church history without being amazed by how much time some spent longing for heaven. And you cannot read world history without being amazed at the kind of emotional energy the afterlife took for most people. (In his book, *Facing Death*, Billy Graham notes that in mainland China archeologists unearthed more than 7,000 clay-sized soldiers – a royal army – standing in battle formation to protect the

F. I want to assume all of that and go a bit deeper today.

V. Let's walk through this passage

A. 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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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. 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."

B. The first thing John mentions about the new heaven and new earth is that there was no more sea

1. This is a troubling statement for those of us who love to sail.
2. I'm hoping it is symbolic
3. Jewish readers - John's primary readers – would be thrilled to hear this. They liked rivers but were a bit unnerved by bigger bodies of water.
 - a) In Hebrew poetry the sea has a negative image. It is the symbol of primordial chaos.
 - b) And in Jewish history the sea's rocky coasts and violent storms seemed to favor the Philistines – who were coastal people.

grave of one of China's first emperors, Shih Huang Ti. The soldiers were equipped with war chariots, weapons and horses – harnessed in gold and silver. This seems like a lot of money to bury in the dirt. But archeologists reason that this king saw death as a battleground and he didn't want to go unprepared. In Egypt we have the physical evidence of the preparation that the Egyptian Pharaohs took. Pyramids – some so large that it took 100,000 workers 40 years to complete. That seems like an unbearable expense for any king. But the Pharaohs reasoned that they would spend a lot more time on the other side of the grave than they would here, so he did whatever he could to prepare. And it follows that if 99+% of our life is going to be spent in heaven, then we would spend more time talking about it – and doing so from the vantage point of Scripture. (I believe that there is a bit more talk about heaven today than ten years ago, but so little of it has any real substance. The way heaven is portrayed in the popular media is very vapid.)

¹² There are eight Hebrew words used for *heaven* in the Old Testament and an additional two Greek terms that show up in the New – together these terms are used over 800 times. The fact is, 53 of the 66 books of the Bible mention heaven – often at very critical moments. If you are reading the Bible you will be frequently directed to think about heaven.

4. statement – being made for a Jewish reader –

C. One of the things theologians debate is whether or not this planet is remade – freed from the burdens, as wonderful, in fact, more wonderful than before – is where we end up.

1. Some – many – say, “No. Heaven is a different place.”

a) It is where God is now. It’s where his throne is.

2. But others point out that what is being described here

a) With the Tree of Life

b) And the River of Living Water

c) God walking with his people

3. That this all sounds familiar. It sounds like Genesis 1 -2.

4. Which I hope is not much of a surprise because:

a) We have been paying attention to how Christ – the second Adam – has been reworking what the first Adam got wrong.

b) We have been looking at the parallels between them.

(1) Seeing how Jesus does for us what Adam failed to do.

(2) How he fulfills the Covenant of Works for us.

(3) He gets it all right.

5. That lends some credence to the idea that what God is going to do for us is remake what was before the fall.¹³

D. And you can build quite an argument here

1. Highlighting things such as Christ being called “the first fruits from the dead”

a) The first installment. The beginning of the harvest

¹³ The Bible is shaped like a giant U. It starts in Paradise, plunges into chaos, but then ends with a promise of Paradise. This U shape makes it a comedy. Not like Seinfeld or the Cosby Show but like Dante’s Divine Comedy. It has that kind of a literary format.

- b) With the corresponding hint that there will be other installments
 - c) Including a New Earth – this one remade
 - 2. Or the fact that John doesn't talk about our escaping this planet but says that what he saw was heaven coming down to earth.
 - a) I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven to us
 - 3. Transforming earth
 - E. I'm not necessarily in that camp, but I have found myself much more open to this idea, which is popular in certain camps.
 - F. To be honest, the location of heaven seems to be of far less importance than the fact that:
 - 1. There is a heaven
 - 2. That Christ is there
 - 3. And that we will see him face to face
 - G. The most important thing about heaven is not whether it is here or there but that it is the place where God is.
 - H. And we will be fully sanctified and glorified there
 - 1. Made perfect
 - 2. And in a perfect relationship to God
 - 3. Which will change everything.
 - a) Remember, last week I noted that if our relationship with God is broken then it necessarily follows that our relationship with ourselves, each other and everything else is also broken
 - 4. Heaven is the place where our relationship with God is mended and as a result everything else is mended as well.
 - 5. Everything works. We are not damaged people causing pain to others.
- VI. I have to tell you, though, that the main thing I got from studying these passages this past week is that it's worth it.

- A. Heaven is worth it.
- B. Being in the presence of God is worth any sacrifice we make.
 - 1. Which is certainly what Paul said.
 - 2. In his letter to the church in Philippi he spoke of giving things up. He writes:
 - a) But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- C. One of the things we need to factor into reading the descriptions found in Rev. 21 and 22 is that they were written for a purpose.
 - 1. Many people treat the Book of Revelation as a sort of secret code written to reveal clues about the future. They treat it like a puzzle to be solved.
 - 2. That's not very helpful.
 - 3. John was not writing a puzzle nor was he writing simply to give us information about heaven
 - a) To satisfy our curiosity.
 - b) This was not an academic exercise
- D. John was writing to encourage people to remain strong in the face of suffering.
 - 1. At the time John was writing, the Roman Emperor Domitian had set up the first wide-scale persecution of Christians.
 - a) His troops were confiscating homes
 - b) Sending Christians into the arena to be torn apart by wild animals
 - c) They were being impaled on stakes, covered with pitch and lit on fire and were being crucified by the hundreds.

(1) In fact, at one point they lined the road leading into Jerusalem for almost 100 miles with the bodies of those they crucified.

- E. John is writing to say look beyond the grave.
- F. Look to Christ – who rose from the dead and promised to raise us from the dead and to take us to be with him in heaven
 - 1. Where God’s will is done perfectly
 - 2. Where there is no sin or suffering – where God himself will dry your tears
 - 3. He is going to take us to the place he told his disciples he was going to prepare
 - 4. It is a place that is glorious. It is a place that is safe
 - 5. The Tree of Life is there. The River is pure. It’s a banquet feast – a coronation celebration.
- G. John’s vision was given to point the followers of Christ to their hope
- H. Which was a ticket to be with the risen Christ in glory forever
- I. We have to see this.
- J. And – and this is a big “and” – and you should know it worked.¹⁴
- K. What the history books tell us is that the early Christians met their suffering with poise and peace and joy
 - 1. They sang hymns while they were being killed
 - 2. They forgave those who were torturing and killing them
- L. They radiated hope because they believed that with Christ as their Lord death was simply a passage way from this life to the next
- M. And so this world was not the place to seek comfort and ease

¹⁴ Negro Spirituals have been critiqued for being too other worldly. Too “pie in the sky.” But in a lecture at Harvard, Howard Thurman, an expert on Negro spirituals, said that it is clear that their faith in God of justice who would ultimately prevail – and who would provide a better place for his children – allowed the slaves to preserve when others would not have made it. It provided a source of hope that their environment - with all of its horror – could not crush.

1. There is nothing wrong with enjoying life and the good things God has given us – in moderation

N. But this was a broken world and the promise of

VII. Now, there are other things to see here

A. Tonight I am going to talk about how they looked to Christ not just as Savior but also as an example and as the Victor

1. And how this shaped how they lived.

B. And in your reading I write about how what theologians refer to as our personal eschatology rolls out

1. This life is followed by death

2. Death is the temporary separation of our body from our soul

a) The first goes into the ground

b) The soul goes to be with Christ – or to a place of suffering, depending on our relationship with Christ.

c) The place theologians refer to as the Intermediate State

3. Then comes the final consummation of the Kingdom

a) Christ returns as judge

b) At which time our bodies are resurrected and united with our souls.¹⁵

4. And that is followed by the final judgment

5. And then heaven or hell

VIII. There is more to the story than I am giving you

A. But the point I want to emphasize today is that the hope of the heaven did change the way the early followers of Christ lived

¹⁵ See Daniel 12:2; I Cor. 15:50ff

- B. And it should change the way we live as well. It can change this world – for the best.
 - C. Some worry that those who think about heaven become worthless here on earth. The exact opposite is the case.
 - D. Those who got heaven – those who were captured by the vision John relayed.
 - 1. Those who believed that they were going to live forever in the presence of the Creator
 - 2. In Paradise
 - E. Those people lived and loved and served and shared and died in such powerful ways that the church grew like a bad weed.
 - F. People said – I realize that signing up to follow Christ might cost me my life.
 - 1. I might get fed to the lions
 - 2. Have my home taken away
 - 3. Be lit on fire – but look at their joy. Look at their peace
 - 4. They are going to live forever, I want in.
 - 5. Which is what led Tertullian to write, “The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.”
 - 6. The more who were killed the more signed up.
- IX. Part of what I hope you see is what this can mean for you.
- A. We are not in danger of being dipped in pitch and lit on fire.
 - B. But we were not made for the broken world full of broken relationships either.
 - C. We were made for God. To be in communion with him. To be enjoying Him. To be in his presence. And that is coming.
 - D. And that thought needs to shape how we think about everything.
 - E. The way you live now is controlled by what you think about the future

1. Now is controlled by then.¹⁶
- F. I want to encourage you to spend more time thinking about then.
1. I want to encourage you to think about the new Heaven and the new earth.
 2. To meditate on what God has promised to those who believe.
 3. To stop storing up treasures in this life, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, and to lay up your treasures in heaven.
- G. If you are a follower of Christ then your desire to be with him face-to-face should be growing.
- H. The description we get of heaven – the promises we have about being in the presence of the King – should encourage us to a whole different level of life in grateful service to others.¹⁷
- X. Questions: The more we learn about heaven the more we will want to be there.
- A. Will we get new bodies?
1. Yes. One of the promises of Heaven is that God will redeem us – this includes every aspect of our being: the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical dimensions. I Cor. 15:42 says that these new bodies will be perfect, glorious, powerful and spiritual. Think about it - no more sickness, sprained ankles, headaches or disease. No growing old, no wearing out, no grief, no grave. We will have traded in the land of the dying for the land of the living. We will get a new nature – one that will want to do what is right, not what is wrong.
- B. How else will we be changed?

¹⁶ As Tim Keller related: If you put two guys into a dingy room and give them the same mindless work to do, but tell one of them that at the end of 2 years he will be paid \$20,000 and you tell the other one that he will be paid \$20,000,000 you will discover that one has a lot more bounce in their step than the other. What you believe about the future shapes you. If you think that we are simply material beings and that once we die that is it – it all ends – then you live one way. If you believe that a new Heaven and a New Earth are coming – and that you can be there in a glorified body forever – that is something altogether different.

¹⁷ Heaven will be the world we never had. Lewis said that when we see it our first response will be, “But of course.” It is the world we were made for, and it is the world we long for. Sensucht is the untranslatable word that describes the feeling that we have when we are longing for something we’ve never seen.

1. New bodies are only a small part of our glorification. The most significant change will be that we will be without sin! And this is a lot more exciting than having knees that are free from arthritis. I would not want to live with myself forever unless I could move beyond the selfishness of my own heart. I am tired of hurting people I love, disappointing others and of having a sinful nature. There will be many wonderful gifts given to us in heaven, but high on the list will be the gift Christ purchased for us – that of freeing us from our sin and giving us his righteousness.

C. Will we recognize each other?

1. In response to that question George MacDonald asked: “Will we be greater fools there than here? Of course we’ll know our loved ones.” W. A. Criswell did him one better. He said, “We will not really know each other until we get to heaven.” I believe that we will. I think that is the clear implication of both Luke 16, and part of who we are. Like God, we are not lovers of God alone, but also lovers of people as well.¹⁸

D. Will there be animals?

1. Why not? They are not eternal beings made in God’s image. But they are not sinners. And, like everything else in this world, they can mediate God’s love and goodness. What we can say is that nothing that must be there for our joy will be lacking.

E. Will we know everything in heaven?

1. Lewis says that heaven will not be a “land of questions but a land of answers, for we shall see the face of God.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Unlike the Gnostics of all kinds (Platonists, Buddhists, Hindus, Manichaeans) who say we will become pure spirit or angels, Christians say that part of creation was a material body, and this body will exist in eternity – albeit in a transformed state. This is part of who we are. Peter Kreeft suggests that in the same way a newborn – or a child in his mother’s womb – looks quite different from a 20 year old, people do notice the resemblance. He suggests that our new bodies will be the same as our old, but different in the same ways a fetus is different from a 20 year old in the prime of life. (Theologians often talk about continuity and discontinuity in our bodies). I should note that we do not fully understand all that will happen at the time that we are glorified (get new resurrection bodies).

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 36.

2. That said, the Bible does not promise that we will know everything. Only God is omniscient. Instead, the suggestion seems to be that we will keep learning – and that we can keep learning for eternity because we will be in the joyous presence of an infinite God.

F. How old will we be in heaven?

1. Twenty-nine.

2. There actually has been quite a bit written about this, with most theologians coming in around 33 – the age Christ died. The belief being that we want to be fully mature but not “on the downhill slide.”

3. There also has been a bit of ink spilled over whether or not we will have any scars or defects in heaven. A few say no. Most say that – just as Christ had holes in his hands, not as scars as much as badges of honor – that our weaknesses and/or deformities will be celebrated.

G. Where is heaven?

1. There is no agreed upon answer to this question.

2. We have established that heaven is a real place – i.e., not a state of mind or vaporous nowhere land. Christ has a real body and He is in heaven at the moment. But the jury is out when it comes to the address of heaven.

3. Some theologians argue that God will remake this earth – restoring it to all of its earlier glory – and that heaven will come down here to join it.²⁰ Others place heaven is a far away galaxy.

4. Among those in the first camp there are two other debates:

a) Some hold that heaven is above us while others hold that it is around us even though we do not have eyes to see it.²¹

²⁰ Among the passages cited for this view is Rom. 8:19 – 21: The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

²¹ Two passages are used to argue for this position: 1) the fact that Elisha’s servant could not see the angelic army that surrounded he and Elisha, protecting them from the Syrians (2 Kings 6:17); and 2) as Stephen was being stoned his eyes were open and he could see Jesus in heaven (Acts 7:55f).

b) Also, some hold that God is going to completely destroys this planet and start again (Lutherans) and others who hold that he is going to restore this planet (Reformed).²²

5. I do not have an opinion at this moment, and would rather argue that what is important about heaven is not where it is located but that in heaven we are able to be with God in the most complete way possible.

a) Heaven will not contain him. (No place can).

b) But Heaven is the place where an infinite God reveals himself infinitely.

H. Will we all be the same?

1. No. That would be dreadful.

I. Will it be as boring as I fear?

1. There is a wide spread fear that heaven is going to be horrifically boring – a bad combination of nothing to do mixed with thousand-year long church services. It has led many – such as Huck Finn – to mistakenly want to “head South” instead.

a) Huck Finn told of his desire to go to hell after his primpy, old aunt described heaven. “Now she got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to lie around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned that Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, ‘Not by a considerable sight.’ I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”

2. It is a satanic triumph of the first order that we even worry about this.²³

a) That we believe the spin that surrounds sin – thinking that it will give us joy.

²² There are quite a few verses that speak about the destruction of the old earth and the creation of a new one (Heb. 1:11f; 12:26; Ps. 102; 2 Pet. 3:10, Rev. 20:11). Grudem – who holds that God will remake this planet and we will live here – argues that the destruction of earth will be limited to the surface, because this planet, before sin, was very good, and destroying it would be a bit of a victory for the Satan.

²³ Right alongside our mistaken belief that sin is good and fun is the equally tragic belief that good is boring. These are lies that cause us untold problems.

b) And we don't believe that what God has prepared for us could be anything other than boring.²⁴

3. Freud, who had nuggets of wisdom sandwiched between the mountains of nonsense, said that we need two things for life to be worth living: love and work. We get both in heaven.

4. Please understand, the Bible describes heaven as a city. One that is full of activity. Revelation describes it as a place of activity. Dante – the author of *The Divine Comedy* - whose views about heaven have shaped a lot of western thought – suggested it was more of a primeval garden – sort of a return to Eden. (John Milton extended that view with *Paradise Lost*.)

5. To the extent that we are told much – and we're not - probably because we'd end up worshipping heaven rather than Christ. But to the extent that we are told about heaven the suggestion is that we'll be fully engaged – loving God and people. And that boredom will not be an issue. We are encouraged to look forward to an eternal destiny of infinite fascination. In a fun article entitled, *Harleys in Heaven*, Dr. John Stackhouse, an author and professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver, says that the only reason he agreed to give up his Harley when his kids were born - something his wife and brother were insisting upon – was his belief that heaven would be full of Harleys – or something better. (He is thinking about the airborne speeders out of *Star Wars*.) He thinks that if there aren't motorcycles and boats and airplanes and all the things he really loves in heaven – there will be something better, and that there his wife will be excited for him to ride them.

6. Perhaps this is pushing the envelope on what can be said a bit – but only in the right direction. What we are promised is something beyond wonder.

7. I believe that anyone who got a true glimpse of heaven would be willing to trade these Shadowlands for Glory in a flash.

J. Is it possible to be too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good?

1. No. Let me start by stating that few are accusing us of that lately. But, in fact, we need to be heavenly-minded in order to be of much earthly good.

²⁴ At one level I get it. I remember hearing about a man who was telling his wife that he'd had a dream that he'd died and had gone to a place where he was waited on hand and foot. And at first he loved it. But then he realized that they would not let him doing anything and he got restless. Eventually he said, "If this is heaven I wish I were in hell." And the being waiting on him said, "this is hell." At which point his wife said, "I know the feeling. That's the 10th time you've told me that story."

2. The Book of Revelation was not written to tell us about heaven simply so we would know about it. It was written to a group of people who were suffering because God knew that a vision of the future would help them persevere in the midst of trials. In other words, God encourages us to think about heaven so that we will be of some earthly good.
3. Those who are captivated by God. Those who seek to live in light of eternity
4. Those who understand their dual citizenship – who believe that this is not our home, we are just passing through²⁵
5. Those who think this way are not lost to this world.
6. They are not the ones who do not care for what happens here – or the people here
 - a) A pregnant woman's concern for her baby's future doesn't detract from her concern for it at the moment.²⁶ It heightens it.
7. Those who start to view this life from the eyes of heaven – and forever - understand what matters. And they value people. And they serve others and steward creation. When you think about heaven you begin to bend your life to reflect that, everyone wins.²⁷

K. Are there different levels of reward in heaven?

²⁵ In I Peter 2:11-12 we are described as aliens and exiles.

²⁶ Kreeft notes that if a woman believes her baby will be born dead, she will cease to take care of it, likewise, if we believe that this life is the end of everything we will cease to take much care of it and the earth. But if we believe that this life is the preparation for eternity, then everything makes an eternal difference. Peter Kreeft, *What Will Heaven Be Like*, Christianity Today, p. 9.

²⁷ What a profound difference it makes to think about heaven! We stop thinking: this is all there is; what you see is all you get; you only live once; the one with the most toys wins. And instead you start thinking: everything I do matters because I am going to live forever – as is everyone else; my life and thoughts all count because this life is preparation for the next one; earth is only heaven's nursery – this is dress rehearsal. Note also, that this point is widely acclaimed. In fact, our Founding Fathers are on record saying that the American experiment would only work in a religious context because it was imperative that people believed they were going to be judged for how they lived by God. Washington and others made it clear that we could not afford a government that was big enough to police the activities of people who did not believe in an afterlife.

1. Yes. This surprises some – who think heaven will be a place where we are all the same. In part, I think, because of a fear that if some are rewarded more than others that there will be jealousy. But there is no suggestion of either jealousy or sameness in heaven.

2. I believe we can expect to be there – as we are here – equal in value, equal in dignity. Equal in the sense that we are loved by God.

3. Edwards says we are different sized vessels but all are filled to overflowing.

L. Are you saying that I should spend a lot of time thinking about heaven?

1. Yes. We must be thinking about forever. We must be cultivating a heavenly mindset.

2. What is so important about heaven? Everything. The real question is, what is so fascinating about everything else?

a) Events and places are important based on the stakes

(1) A football game for a title is more important than a preseason scrimmage.

3. Well, the consequences of this doctrine are huge. We are talking about eternity. Long after your job is over and your life is over and whether or not the last deal has gone through. When this solar system has spent its energy and has lapsed into heat death the promise of Christ is that we remain in heaven with God – or cut off from him

a) It does not make much sense that many people spend more time planning their next vacation than they do thinking about or planning for heaven.

4. Heaven matters.

5. C.S. Lewis wrote in the Problem of Pain

a) We are very shy nowadays of even mentioning Heaven. We are afraid of the jeer about “pie in the sky,” and of being told that we are trying to “escape from the duty of making a happy world here and now into dreams of a happy world elsewhere.” But either there is a “pie in the sky” or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced.

6. The question is not
 - a) Whether we want to believe that we are going to live forever
 - b) Whether anyone else believes it
 - c) The question is, is it true?
 - d) Jesus Christ very clearly teaches that it is true. He left heaven to come to earth so that we can leave earth to go to heaven.

XI. Questions:

- A. What point has stayed in your mind from the weekend's sermon?
- B. According to most polls, most Americans believe in heaven. (One recent poll put the number at 74%). Setting aside the fact that 50% believe in ESP, 25% believe we have been visited by aliens and 16% believe that Elvis is working at a bowling alley in Nashville, let me ask this question: why do you think most people think about heaven so infrequently? Doesn't it strike you as odd that people believe in heaven, believe they are going to live there forever, and then show so little interest in it? Do you think about heaven much? Ever? Do you long for it or think of it as a second best option?
- C. What are some of the misconceptions about heaven that keep people from wanting to be excited about going there?
- D. What do you look forward to most about heaven? Are you drawn to the idea of meeting God, having a redeemed body, the absence of death and suffering, something else?
- E. Why do you think God wants us to be mindful of heaven?
- F. Do you think it is wrong to be motivated by the rewards of heaven?

XII. Announcements

- A. Prayer after the service
- B. Let me make the open offer that you can talk with others up front about placing your faith in Christ.
 1. In our passage today (Rev. 21:27) John said that, "Nothing impure will ever enter heaven, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.
 2. You need to ask, "Is my name in the Lamb's Book of Life?" Do I know?

3. As I noted last week, this is not our default position.
 - a) By nature we are enemies of God
 - b) Jesus is very clear, we need to be reborn
 - c) We need to have our moral debt paid
 - d) We need to be justified
 4. C.S. Lewis has said that we are in for two surprises about heaven
 - a) First – who is there.
 - b) Second – who is not.
 - c) Be sure you are there.
- C. Tonight there is a special church history / theology lecture in which we are going to go a bit deeper into the topic of Christ's work on the cross.
- D. In 2 Sundays there will a Q & A session on this past FP study.
 1. I have recruited Dr. Walt Liefeld (PhD in NT) and Dr. Nathan Clayton (PhD in OT) to help me answer whatever questions you have.
 2. It would be ever so helpful if you would email me those questions in advance.
- E. Next week we will continue in our study of Genesis