

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

HERE AS IN HEAVEN: HEAVEN AND HELL

Aloha everyone and hau'oli makahiki hou! I pray your New Year is off to a great start and that the fast is yielding fruit. We are extremely excited about what God has in store for this year! This is a year of big transition in the Palompo household. We had a beautiful installation service last night. But God is keeping me grounded in subtle ways. As I mentioned, January 1st kicked off our Church's 40-day fast. Every year I fast from recreational media (Instagram, Facebook, movies, YouTube, and Streaming Services). Right before the fast, I got a notification on Instagram that Pastor Wayne Cordeiro was following me. I thought, "He must've heard about the transition." I immediately went to my feed and started deleting posts. I posted something on my birthday a couple years ago where I was posing poolside with the caption, "35 Ain't no vibe". I thought Pastor Wayne wouldn't like that. Then I thought, "This guy only follows like 70 people. I wonder who else is in this inner circle." So I started scrolling through people he followed and I didn't recognize a single name. I thought, "He doesn't follow Pastor so-and-so but he follows me?" Then I checked his followers and I still didn't recognize anyone. So I went to the oldest post on his feed and it was posted 15 hours ago. I checked his account name. It wasn't Wayne Cordeiro, it was Wayne Cordiero! I had been catfished. So God has been keeping me grounded. We've also been going through an amazing devotional. Aside from our 21-day devotional, *Here as in Heaven* that many of us are going through, I also go through an annual Bible reading plan, and the reading for January 1 was Genesis 1,

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," (Genesis 1:1).

I thought, how appropriate that we should start the new year off [where?] in the beginning! I love New Years because it always feels like a new beginning – a fresh start. Our Church is going through something of a new beginning this year and it's exciting. But that's not to say that new beginnings are easy. And it's not to say that new beginnings aren't scary.

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep..."
(Genesis 1:2).

Sometimes new beginnings are scary. A lot of people have a word, or a theme for the new year. But for many of us, we look ahead and it just seems formless, empty, and dark. What's out there? What lies ahead? And maybe you're feeling a little anxious this morning because you feel behind the ball. Maybe you feel like the new year is taking off ready or not! Maybe you're freaking out because you don't have your word for the year. The good news is that you don't have to have this year figured out because God already does.

OG Discussion Question: *How do you feel about 2023? Have you taken time to ask the Lord for His vision for this year?*

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³ "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day,"
(Genesis 1:3-5).

Into the chaos, into the confusion, into the darkness, God spoke and suddenly there was light. Suddenly there was order. Suddenly there was life and creativity! So rather than getting hung up on your word, or your vision, or trying to manifest your dreams into reality, why don't we allow God to speak into our year and give us His plan for 2023? Because this isn't just true of the universe, it's true for you.

"Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction," (Proverbs 29:18).

Without revelation, without a word from the Lord, without His guidance, without His divine voice to guide the way, people plunge into chaos. Our lives are chaos and the future is uncertain. But blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.

In a moment I'm going to share the word we believe God has given our Church for 2023 but for those of you who have been with us for sometime you know that my Dad usually gives the opening message of the year and shares with us some notable deaths from the year prior. These are people for whom 2022 was their last year on earth.

Sidney Poitier, 94 (Actor)
Bob Saget, 65 (America's Dad on Full House, Host of AFV)
Louie Anderson, 68 (Comedian, Life with Louie)
Gilbert Gottfried, 67 (Comedian, Voice of Iago)
Liz Sheridan, 93 (Jerry's Mother) April
Estelle Harris, 93 (George's Mother) April
Olivia Newton-John, 73 (Grease)
Mikhail S. Gorbachev, 91 (Reagan's iconic speech)
Queen Elizabeth II, 96 (Britain's longest-reigning monarch)
Coolio, 59 (Gangster's Paradise)
Angela Lansbury, 96 (Murder she wrote)
John McVay, 91 (Key figure in the making of a 49ers dynasty)
Kristie Alley, 71 (Cheers)
Barbara Walters, 93
Pope Benedict, 95 (Last words in Italian, "Lord, I love You!")
Gail Rames (Served faithfully, even while battling illness)
Wayne Miyasato (Faithfully served, intercession, CA)
Angelina Palompo (Pastor Mike's Mother)

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In the last years of her life, my Grandma battled Alzheimer's disease and dementia. In the end, she didn't really know any of us and she had an incomplete grasp on reality. Shortly after she passed, our entire family was gathered around her bedside singing songs of worship and sharing scripture with one another. The Lord placed this one on my heart,

"Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely," (1 Corinthians 13:12).

You see, it wasn't just my Grandma who saw the world imperfectly. We all struggle to see the world for what it truly is. Our vision is partial and incomplete at best. And even though my Grandma struggled in the end to make sense of this world, the Bible says she now sees with perfect clarity. She knows everything completely and is completely known.

Our planet is currently spinning at break-neck speeds of 1,000 miles per hour on an axis tilt of 23.5 degrees. How many more rotations before it's our last? For many people, 2022 was their last year on earth. Are we ready?

OG Discussion Question: What if this was your last year on earth? What do you think the most important thing would be to do?

Heaven

Last year we spent all of 2022 learning about our Kingdom Authority. We learned that the central message of Jesus' gospel was not salvation but the Kingdom. It was not going to heaven but bringing heaven to earth. We spent much of the year talking about Giving God Control of the different spheres of our lives and Owning our Role to partner with what God wants to do in world. Jesus says that this is the pursuit of every believer – to contend for heaven on earth. That is why our word for 2023 is Heaven.

More than ever, we are believing this is going to be a year where we experience the outpouring of heaven in our world and in our lives like never before. We are believing for the miracles of heaven, the authority of heaven, and the Lord of heaven to fill our lives and change our world. We want to experience heaven in our homes, heaven in the streets, and heaven in our communities. The unification of heaven and earth is what the story of the Bible is all about.

Heaven and Hell

Many western narratives are written in a linear fashion. You have a beginning, middle, and end. Hebrew narratives are often circular and the Bible is no different. The story of the Bible ends the way it begins. It begins with heaven and earth as one in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and it ends with heaven and earth as one in the New Creation in Revelation. It begins with God and His people as one and it ends with God and His people as one. It begins with a perfect and sinless world and it ends with a perfect and sinless world.

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So God is a God of restoration. He is not going to destroy the earth, He is going to restore it. As Christians, we are in the business of restoration. We are contending for something that once was and again will be.

But the Bible is clear that our world, apart from Christ, is in a state of darkness.

"Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life,' (John 8:12).

"I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness," (John 12:46).

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them," (Isaiah 9:2).

"The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned," (Matthew 4:16).

I could read countless passages that talk about creation existing in a state of darkness. But what is darkness? Darkness is the absence of light. Did you know darkness does not exist by itself as a unique physical entity, but is simply the absence of light? Sin is the absence of love. When Adam and Eve rejected God's love sin entered the world. Watch this, hell is the absence of God's Presence. Hell is not a fiery place that bad people go to when they die. Hell is a place void of God's Presence. This is why people can say, "My job is hell, my marriage is hell, home-life is hell." It's dark, there's no love, God seems absent. So we experience darkness wherever God's light is absent, we experience sin in the absence of love, we experience hell in the absence of His Presence. So going back to our word for 2023. What is heaven? Is heaven a shining place we go to when we die? No, heaven is not a place it's a Person. Heaven is God's Presence. "Your Presence is heaven to me!" This is why Moses could say in Exodus 33:15,

"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."

We don't want the promise land without You because You are the promise land. This is what we're contending for this year.

OG Discussion Question: How does this understanding of heaven and hell inform how we contend for heaven on earth?

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Conclusion

Each of us was created to shine the light in dark places. Sort of like this chem-light. Through the plastic container you can see a fluid inside but it is not fulfilling its purpose. It is not giving off light. It is only reflecting the darkness around it. It is not having any impact on the surrounding darkness. I can shake it, yell at it, but still it does not shine. But if you look closer you will see that there is another container within. You see this chem-light will only fulfill its purpose when it is broken and the inner liquid flows throughout the rest of the body. Then it shines a bright light in the midst of a dark world.

So it is with each of us. You have the Holy Spirit which is Christ in you but are you allowing Him to shine through your life into the darkness around you? Like this chem-light, we have to be broken in order for Him to shine. We must come to the breaking point where pride and selfishness give way to His plan and purpose. Then we will experience His light in this dark world on earth as it is in heaven.

"On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining," (1 John 2:8).

God's light is already breaking forth into our world. Will you shine this year and allow heaven to flow through you? The beautiful thing about darkness is that no matter how dark it may seem, there are always traces of light that our human eyes are just unable to perceive, but it's there.

"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," (Revelation 21:23).

One day, when heaven and earth are reunited, God's light will expel all darkness. There will no longer be sin or brokenness. This is what we're contending for until He returns.