

HEAVEN REVEALED

HEAVEN REVEALED: HEAVEN (PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE)

Introduction:

Aloha everyone and welcome to our service! Today we are continuing our brand new series, Heaven Revealed. Since the beginning of the year, we've been focusing on Heaven and its relationship to earth. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus instructed His disciples to pray,

"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," (Matthew 6:10 NIV).

So we are here to contend for the reality of heaven on earth. But how can we do that if we don't understand what heaven is like? Last week we debunked two common misconceptions about heaven:

1. Heaven cannot be understood (Perspective)
2. The Earth is going to be destroyed (Purpose)

OG DISCUSSION QUESTION: *What was your biggest takeaway from Week 1 of our series?*

Instead we discovered that not only are we able to understand heaven, we are instructed to! Remember Paul wrote, "Set your sights on the realities of heaven. Think about the things of heaven." Today we will take a closer look at the second truth, that God's plan is not to destroy the earth but to restore it.

Restoration

To restore means, "To return (someone or something) to a former condition, place, or position."

Remember the illustration of the 1955 Chevy last week? If you asked someone to restore your Chevy, you wouldn't expect them to bring back a Cadillac. Those are two different things! You'd expect to see your Chevy in brand new condition. In the same way, God is planning to restore creation good as new!

Today we need to go back to the future! Because in order to understand the future of heaven, we need to see what God did in the past. Having a clear picture of the original earth will give us a better picture of how God is going to restore it.

In the Beginning

²⁶ *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground,'" (Genesis 1:26).*

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God created mankind in His image. To be made in God's image means we were created to be a representation of heaven in creation. Through the Lord's prayer Jesus is teaching us to pray that the reality heaven would be represented in and through our lives to creation. This means that we should not only ask but expect that this will happen.

OG DISCUSSION QUESTION: *In what ways should we pray and expect for heaven to be revealed through our lives?*

Part of being made in God's image was being given authority over creation. We were created to rule with God upon the earth. A big part of Jesus' ministry on earth was to restore His disciple's authority.

¹⁶ *"The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He has given to mankind,"*
(Psalm 115:16).

Are you seeing the picture here? This is important because you will see a lot of these exact same themes at the end of the story. In the endless span of space God creates a special place (a beautiful paradise) in which He and His children can live in relationship. He gives His children purpose and authority. They are to enjoy the earth but also cultivate and subdue it. There is a sense of creative purpose given to mankind. Jesus says there is a direct correlation between how we live and work in this life to our responsibilities and what we are entrusted with in the life to come. In Genesis we see mankind naked but unashamed (not naked and afraid). There is a sense of perfect trust and security. There is perfect harmony and oneness.

We're going to devote a whole week to the new heaven and the new earth but I want to give you just a snapshot of how this ties in to the future.

¹ *"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. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ '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."*

⁵ *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,"* (Revelation 21:1-5 NIV).

Restoration

God is going to restore heaven and earth. Look at that phrase, "I am making everything new!" That word "new" in the Greek is the word, *Kainos*. It is the same word in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV).

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How many of you are thankful today that we serve a God of restoration! He doesn't destroy broken things, He restores them! Now, when I came to Christ, the most important part of me was transformed – my spirit. I became a new creation in Christ in that my spirit was resurrected and I could now have a relationship with God. Jesus didn't die to make bad people good. He died to make the spiritually dead come alive! But even though I was a new creation, it's not like nobody could recognize me. It's not like my parents were like, "Who is this stranger in our house? We don't recognize you!" And I was like, "Don't worry, Mom, Dad, it's me Mark. I'm a new creation now. That's probably why you didn't recognize me." The same is true for creation. When God recreates the heavens and the earth, the most important things will be different (no sickness, no sin, no death) but there will still be many familiar aspects to it.

Imagine you drove a really run down, beat up car that was on its last legs. Some of you are like, "Don't need to imagine." You can see the street through the rust damage in the floors, the window-cranker no work, etc. But someone says, "The Lord put you on my heart, and I want to bless you with a brand new car." You wouldn't say, "What? A brand new car? I-I can't even imagine what that would be like!" Yes, you can! You know what a car is. Now just picture a car without issues, some new features, and better mileage.

It's the same thing with the new creation. Picture a new earth without any pollution, no wars, no disease, no racism, no division. Picturesque landscapes, thriving cities with rich cultures. There are so many experiences on earth that give us a snapshot of what the new creation will be like.

OG DISCUSSION QUESTION: What experiences in life have given you a snapshot of heaven?

This past week in our daily devotions Doctor Brian Misaka shared about a group of Christian brothers he's known for 30 years and the kindred friendship they share. Think about the people (or person) in your life who understands you better than anyone. You don't have to be a certain way for them, you can just be yourself. That's the kind of acceptance we will know in heaven. The feeling of joy in having a parent delight in you or delighting in your children when they do something awesome. How about the feeling of holding your newborn for the first time and instantly loving them unconditionally. Some people shared that for them it's the feeling of being in nature. Absolutely. Sitting in an empty lineup at sunset at your home break. The setting sun backlighting the waves as they come in. These are all snapshots of heaven. Of course life and stressors break those moments up but imagine if there were no interruptions, just endless joy.

¹⁰ *"Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away," (Psalm 90:10).*

The best of this life is marred with trouble and sorrow and eventually death comes for us all but Heaven will be endless joy. All of our years will be the best of them.

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Heavenly Timeline

We will go into greater detail in the weeks to come, but I want to give you a timeline of Heaven (Past, Present and Future).

Genesis 1-2 (Creation)

- God creates a perfect world and places mankind in it to rule over creation.

Genesis 3 (The Fall)

- Mankind abuses their authority, rejects God's rule, and chooses to determine good and evil for themselves.
- This cataclysmic event plunges creation into sin and unleashes hell on earth. God's Presence departs from the earth.

Genesis 3 - Malachi

- Throughout the entire Old Testament the world is plunged in darkness. God intervenes throughout history to stop mankind from completely destroying itself.
- God begins setting the stage to restore heaven to earth.

The Gospels

- Jesus comes to earth, but instead of being consumed by the darkness, He overcomes the powers of sin and death on the cross.
- Wherever Jesus goes Heaven breaks forth to eliminate the powers of sin and establish the rule of God's Kingdom.

Acts - Revelation

- After Jesus ascends into heaven His followers continue His mission of contending for heaven on earth.
- God has slowly been restoring humanity back to its origins.
- Jesus will return and judge the earth.
- God will reunite heaven and earth in a restored creation.

From this timeline we can see two major themes at work.

God is relentlessly trying to get the hell out of His world.

So many people ask, "How could a loving God create a place like hell? How could a loving God destine people to hell? How could a loving God create a world of suffering?" The reality is that, because He is a loving God He gives us the ability to choose. Even if that means choosing ourselves over Him. But many people don't realize what the alternative to God is until they've made their choice. God didn't unleash suffering upon this world. We did when we rejected His rule and all that came with it. As C.S. Lewis once said, "Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom." But God is the one trying to get the hell out of His world and that includes the hell in mankind. We want God to eliminate the problems of this world without eliminating us! This is why Jesus came, not to remove the problems out there but to remove the

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problems in here. He's doesn't just want to remove war, He wants to remove anger. He doesn't just want to remove sex-trafficking, He wants to remove lust. He's after a world that is 100% free of sin. We want to live in a perfect world but the minute we got there it wouldn't be perfect anymore! Jesus died so we could be set free from the power of sin. The day is coming when God will entirely remove all traces of hell from His creation.

God is relentlessly pursuing the restoration of creation.

The entire story of the Bible and of history is of a loving Father who is desperately trying to get back to His children. No matter how much mankind rejects Him, He continue to pursue. This is why He gave the laws and the prophets and eventually His Son to die.

Communion

²⁶ *"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is My body."*

²⁷ *Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom," (Matthew 26:26-29).*

Jesus poured out His life so that we could be forgiven of our sins. He died to remove the hell from our lives and from our world. Just as He was resurrected, so we will be resurrected and live again with Him in a new creation. The difference is that now we will know what it costed. As we eat and drink with Him we will remember the grace that He gave so that we could be with Him.

OG DISCUSSION QUESTION: How has this week changed your perspective on heaven, hell, or what God is doing in our world?