

New Heavens and a New Earth

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[0:00] For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, near the beginning of Mark Twain's classic work, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we find Huck Finn having an interesting conversation about the afterlife with a rather uptight authority figure.

And here's what Huck has to say about that conversation. This is the character speaking in the first person. She said it was wicked to say what I said. Said she wouldn't say it for the whole world. She was going to live so as to go to the good place.

Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind. I wouldn't try it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble and wouldn't do any good.

Now she had got it started, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing forever and ever.

[1:38] So I didn't think much of it, but I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight.

I was glad about that. I was glad about that because I wanted him and me to be together. Well then. Is anyone looking forward to spending eternity walking around all day with a harp in hand in the company of uptight, self-righteous people?

It doesn't sound like my idea of a good time. I don't know about yours. But what we see in our reading from Isaiah this morning, where we see a glimpse of what our eternity will look like, is actually a very different picture, isn't it?

We await something very different. We are awaiting nothing less than new heavens and a new earth.

That is precisely what we will have when Jesus comes again. Jesus, even now, is at the Father's right hand in heaven. And those believers who have fallen asleep in the Lord are already there with him.

[2:55] And as great as that is and as wonderful, that is not all. Because heaven is going to come to earth. Because Christ is returning. Now, the last couple weeks, we've spent a fair amount of time on the sobering side of Christ's return.

That the judgment is coming. That the heavens will be dissolved. That the earth and the deeds done on it will be exposed. But that's only one side of the coin, isn't it?

The other side is, again, that heaven is coming to earth. That the Lord is bringing in new heavens and a new earth when he returns.

Now, if you've stopped and really considered the state of the world that we live in, that's pretty good news, isn't it? We look around and we see sin, sorrow, death, decay, disease, pestilence, war, famine.

That could go on. We really want those things to go on forever. This morning, I want us to see that we don't have to expect to live with those things forever.

[4:07] Because the promise that Christ is coming, that we will dwell with him, that we will be his people forever. As I mentioned in this week's newsletter, the evangelist Billy Graham once said, Bible teaching about the second coming of Christ was thought of as doomsday preaching.

But not anymore. It is the only ray of hope that shines as an ever-brightening beam in a darkening world. So at the end of the day, this is not doomsday preaching that I'm standing up here proclaiming this morning.

But the only ray of hope in a darkening world. That's what this is about. So I'll say it again. In the face of sin.

In the face of death. In the face of darkness. Jesus Christ and his promise to come again stands. As a bright and radiant beam that shines in the darkness.

And cannot be overcome. He is coming. He is bringing new heavens and a new earth with him when he comes.

[5:26] What will that look like? What are we looking forward to? That's what I want us to consider this morning. Let's look at Isaiah chapter 65 together.

Verse 17 we read. For behold I create new heavens and a new earth. And the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. The former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

What does that mean? What former things? Does it mean that we are going to forget everything that ever came before? I don't think so.

Will we ever forget our Savior's death and resurrection? I certainly don't think so. Will we ever forget that he saved us from our sins?

I don't think so. So what does it mean? It means that sin and all the effects of sin will be gone.

[6:36] Will be defeated. Will be more distant than even a distant memory. Because the Lord's victory over sin will be so complete and total. Sin and its effects will be wiped out as if they never existed.

What does that mean for us? What will it be like to be finally free from sin? Can you imagine that? For one it means that believers will be set free from the struggle with sin.

That we find the Apostle Paul describing in Romans 7. Never again will we have to say. I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. Never again will we have to say.

I do not do the good I want. But the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. We will finally and fully be set free from sin.

And we'll be finally and fully delivered from this body of death. The stain of sin. The struggle against sin that is so much a part of the Christian life in this world.

[7:53] That will be over. And we will be completely cleansed and victorious in Christ. Praise God. All the effects of sin will be overturned.

One effect of sin that will be gone forever is mourning, sorrow, grief. Will be gone. Of God's holy city, the new Jerusalem and the new earth.

We read this. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping.

And the cry of distress. Weeping. The cry of distress gone forever. A promise we see expanded on in Revelation where we're promised that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

So I can look forward to that and say that everything that's ever caused me to weep, everything that's ever caused me to cry in distress, whether grief, pain, guilt, fear, whatever it is, it will be gone and banished forever by our victorious Lord.

[9:11] I'm going to let my hillbilly roots show here for a second, so bear with me. One bluegrass gospel classic puts it like this.

There will be no sad farewells. There will be no tear-dimmed eyes. And that's the truth. Never again for God's redeemed people. Which brings us to the next effect of sin that Isaiah in our text addresses, and that is death.

No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. Now that's extraordinary enough.

That's already, we're already seeing the curse of sin, death being overturned. It's starting to be overturned. But in Revelation 21, we see that the promise given to Isaiah is extended even further, where we read that death will be no more.

Now can you imagine that? Death will be no more. What does that mean? When Jesus comes again, the dead will be raised, and those who have found salvation in Christ will be given glorious, resurrected bodies that won't ever break and will last forever.

[10:40] Now, that's something I think about pretty often when my rheumatoid arthritis is at its worst and my joints hurt. I'm reminded that one day that will be gone, and death, which is ultimately the cause of these bodies of ours breaking down, that will be gone too.

And then I think about it when I remember those I love who have died. I think of them often.

Remember my grandmother Dolores, one of the most loving people I've ever known, that we watched her die of Alzheimer's.

I remember my grandfather, definitely the most lovably quirky person I've ever met. I guess that's where I got my quirkiness from. Who died of cancer.

I remember a dear friend, my buddy Phil, who died tragically young. Especially think of him often.

And I remember the day when as a high school kid, I served as one of his pallbearers.

I remember at his funeral, sitting down on the grass of the cemetery and weeping, realizing that I would never again see him on this side of eternity. And you have your own stories of those you love and see no longer.

[12:08] I remember them. And I remember that one day, death will be fully and finally defeated. And I rejoice. And with it, violence and war, two of the things that we fear the most, will be vanquished.

We read, the wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox. Now, if that's not an image of peace, I really don't know what is.

Trying to imagine that is like trying to imagine my dog not attempting to rip my shoulder out of socket when I'm walking her and she sees a cat. Now, I'd also add that if even the lion is going to eat straw, I'll get the last laugh at the jokes Raymond is always cracking about my vegetarianism. Just throwing that out there. But, in the new heavens and the new earth, what do we see? Sin is gone.

Sorrow is gone. Death is gone. Violence and war is gone. But it doesn't end there. There's a small detail at the end of this passage that would be easy to overlook.

[13:26] I don't want us to miss that. In verse 25, we read, Dust shall be the serpent's food. What does that tell us?

That tells us that the serpent, the devil, the deceiver, the accuser, the tempter, the father of lies, Satan, will eat the dust.

His head will be crushed, trampled under the feet of our victorious, crucified, and risen Savior. Sin, death, and the devil will be gone and it will be glorious.

That city, the new Jerusalem, and the new earth will be the perfect, eternal home of all the redeemed. Now here's a question.

How did we get there? I'm glad that you asked. Thomas asked basically the same question, didn't he? How can we know the way?

[14:39] And what's the answer that Jesus gives? I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. This morning, do we know the way?

The way is Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Putting our trust in Him is the only way, but it is a sure way.

It's the only way. We won't get there any other way, but it is a certain way. We come to Jesus through faith in His blood and repentance.

We can be certain that we will get there. It will be glorious beyond all imagining. But, the most glorious thing will be the loving relationship that we will have with our God as we glorify our glorious God and enjoy Him forever.

That's the best part. We will see His face and He will dwell with us. But, this isn't all just for the future, my brothers and my sisters.

[15:58] As believers, the amazing thing is that because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can enjoy a closer walk with the Lord now.

in fact, if we're not desiring that closer walk with the Lord now, it stands to reason that we probably wouldn't enjoy it very much later.

So, this morning I asked, do you have joy in the Lord? Do you have a desire to glorify Him in your life and to live for Him? Do you desire a closer walk with Jesus?

Let's be real, sometimes in the Christian life, we don't delight in the Lord the way we should. I've been there.

And pretty much every time I've been there, it's been because I haven't been spending enough time with Him in prayer and in His Word, the Holy Scriptures. I want us to understand this morning that the greatest thing that we will enjoy when the new heavens and the new earth come, when heaven comes to earth, when Christ comes again, the greatest thing will be the immediate presence of our God and uninterrupted perfect communion with Him that lasts forever.

[17:30] forever. So let's get ready for that by enjoying His presence now. Why wouldn't we? So a little bit of liturgical trivia, this morning is called Garete Sunday, using fancy Latin words as

Anglicans are prone to do.

It's just a way of designating this as the Sunday during Lent that is focused on joy and on rejoicing. That's what the pink candle is about in case you were wondering.

And we have so many reasons to rejoice, don't we? the promise of Christ's coming shines brighter every day as we draw nearer to His coming.

It is light that shines in the darkness of this fallen world but is not overcome. So my brothers and my sisters, rejoice and prepare your hearts to meet Him when He comes.

We all say from our hearts, come Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[18:56] Amen.