

Finally Home: What Heaven Means for Earth

Godliness

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark Vroegop

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace (2 Peter 3:8–14)

Six weeks ago we started this series with a quote from C.S. Lewis, and I want to return to it and consider if we hear his words differently now:

“If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think about the other world that they have become so infective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’; aim at earth and you will get neither.”¹

The purpose of these weeks together has been for us to consider what heaven means for earth. My prayer for this series has been that God would give you a new passion for what heaven will be like so that something happens to how you live right now. We’ve been trying to answer this question: “If heaven is like that, how do I live now?”

Over the last few weeks, we have looked at the following:

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Collier Books, 1960), 118. As cited in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 21.

- We learned what it meant to “seek the things which are above” and to “set our minds on things that are above” from Colossians 3.
- In Revelation 4 we marveled at the glory of God and enjoyed one of my favorite Sunday services in the last 3-4 years.
- We talked about resurrected bodies from 1 Corinthians 15 and how the resurrection will seem as normal as corn springing up in a field after a farmer has planted his seed.
- Then we looked at the New Heaven and the New Earth in Revelation 21-22, and we learned about God’s forever people living in God’s forever place under God’s forever rule.
- Last week we examined the matter of perfection or glorification – the moment when our entire being, both body and soul, reflect the glory and image of Jesus Christ.

It has been a marvelous journey together, and I hope this spurs you on to think more deeply about how your future really informs how you live now. As our videos have shown, there is a great deal of interest in heaven, and it is a great opportunity to start a gospel-centered conversation with someone. What’s more, I hope that this series has served to remind you where your citizenship really lies. I hope that talking about heaven has served to reorient your heart and reignite your boldness.

To that end, we are going to take four weeks in June to look at the life and ministry of Daniel. I want us to see how Daniel and his friends lived out their other-worldly citizenship while navigating the challenges of Babylon, the military and cultural center of the world in 600 years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. Along with this series we are going to host a Sunday Night Forum on the issue of Religious Liberty on June 12 at 6 p.m. As we enter the intense season of a national election, and given the number of cultural changes around us, I want to take some time to talk with you about these issues in general and about how our elders and pastors are trying to navigate them.

The Future Has Implications

Today we are drawing this series to a close by focusing mainly on the implications of the New Heaven and the New Earth. I’ve touched on this throughout the series at various points, but I want to spend most of our time unpacking, very specifically, what heaven means for earth.

Our text is 2 Peter 3:8-14, and there are two key words that serve as signposts for where we are heading in this passage: “since” (v. 11) and “therefore” (v. 14). When you read your Bible, notice words like these because they are important indicators of implications. They will lead you to applications of the text.

What these words do is drive us from the facts about the future to an ethic in light of the future. Eschatology and actions are more linked than what you probably even realize. In other words, what you believe about the afterlife, judgment, heaven, and hell are very predictive of how you live right now. For instance, if you believe that there is no judgment and no accountability for our actions in the future, that will surely have an effect on your morality. If you believe that God saves everyone regardless of what they do with Jesus, you will not see any need to share the gospel or invite someone to believe in Jesus. If you believe that Jesus has saved you from your sins, if you believe that He will return and that He could come back at any moment, and if you believe that you will live with God forever, that affects how you live right now. What you believe about heaven has huge implications.

The Concern and Calling of 2 Peter

Now we are jumping right into a text in 2 Peter, so you need to know a few things about this book. First, it is written by Peter as he anticipates persecution and likely his own death. The words in 1:12-15 indicate that Peter believes his death to be very near (“since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon” – 1:14). Second, Peter desires to see grace and peace multiplied to the churches to whom he is writing as they face the coming onslaught of potential persecution in their own lives. He wants them to be confident in God’s spiritual provision (1:3-4) so that they can grow in maturity (1:5-9), with the hope that they can endure all the way to “the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:11). Third, Peter wants to combat false teaching that was causing them to lack confidence in God’s plan for their lives and which would lead to ungodly living (2:1-3).

Therefore, Peter’s aim in writing this letter is to encourage godly living in the midst of the potential of false teaching and persecution. One of the main assaults on the Christian faith was the accusation that Jesus was not coming again.

³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 2 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV)

Now, what does Peter do to combat this charge? He calls them to not forget about God’s promise, to keep waiting for the return of Jesus, and to live righteously. Let’s look at each of these, but especially the third point.

1) Remember

Peter begins by calling these churches to remember the promised plan of God. The false teachers, combined with circumstances, were causing these believers to doubt, and Peter fears that they will succumb to sinful behavior. Doubting God’s promises eventually leads to doubting the value of righteous living. In other words, if you begin to doubt that Jesus is indeed returning, that there is a going to be a day of judgment, and that heaven and hell are real, it will affect how you live.

In verse 8 Peter says, “But do not overlook this one fact beloved . . .” Now we’ll look at what he says next, but first, I want to highlight the importance of the word “overlook.” The word means to fail to recognize or call to mind, to be unnoticed, or to forget. The word could mean to accidentally forget or to not see something because it is concealed. But in this context, the failure to remember has a moral culpability attached to it.

The idea is to call something to mind because you need to remember it in light of the consequences of being distracted with other things. You could think of it as when a parent says to their teenage driver, “Remember! No speeding and no texting.” It is not that the teenager doesn’t realize that speeding and texting are bad. Rather, other things could cause him or her to neglect or overlook this important reality.

Now it is interesting that in verse 5 Peter says that the false teachers “deliberately overlook” the fact that God has acted in human history before by virtue of creation, judgment, and other important moments. So the false teachers are deliberately overlooking, and Peter is exhorting the church to not fall into the trap of living as though the future is not determined by God.

What does Peter not want them to overlook? What does he want them to remember? Three things.

First, in verse 8, he tells them that their understanding of time versus God’s understanding of time are very different. A day with the Lord is a thousand years to us. In other words, we should not grow weary as we wait for the Lord’s return, nor should we succumb to doubt, because our perspective on time is not the same as God’s perspective. Remember, God is working on a different timeline.

Second, remember that there is a purpose to God’s timing. Verse 9 indicates that one of the many reasons that God has delayed is for the purpose of evangelism. God is on a mission to save people, and His delay should be seen as patience and kindness so that more people can be redeemed.

Third, Peter reiterates the promise of that is to come will come suddenly and when it is unexpected. In verse 10 Peter identifies that the coming Day of the Lord will be like a thief coming in the night, and it will involve the reconstitution of the universe, along with the judgment of God. Two weeks ago we talked about the New Heaven and the New Earth, and that is what Peter is referring to when he talks about the heavens being set on fire and dissolved.

But the main point here is the surprising judgment that happens. This is often a part of the language surrounding the end of the age. For example, Matthew 24:37-39 speaks about this in the following way:

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:37-39 (ESV)

Therefore, the church should not be shocked when people live as if there is no future judgment because the return of Jesus will be surprising. What’s more, believers should not be shaken in their faith if more and more people in the culture scoff at the idea of the Lord’s return.

Peter is calling this church and us to remember. He desires to stir up a sincere mind by way of reminder (2 Peter 3:1), and I hope that is what this series has done for you. Our problem is not that we do not believe heaven is real; rather, the issue is that the reality of heaven can be something that we simply overlook and do not think about.

The pressures of life, the good things related to living on earth, and affections that are too easily tied to living now can easily create a scenario where we start to live as if heaven is not real, Jesus is not coming back, and as if there is no Day of Reckoning. And all it takes is a skeptic, a cynic, or a scoffer to make some off-handed comment, and our faith starts to falter. Peter says, “No! Remember! Jesus is coming back.”

2) Keep Looking

The second thing that I want to highlight is how Peter directs the church to a posture of anticipation and waiting for the coming of the Lord. He calls them to keep looking. Not only are they to remember the promises, but they are also to actively orient their minds and hearts toward the future. They are to remember and look.

Now verse 11 has the first of two implication signposts with the word “since.” In light of what Peter just said about the promise of God, there is a kind of life that believers are to live.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 2 Peter 3:11–12 (ESV)

We will come back to the the issue of holiness and godliness in a minute, but I want you to notice the word “waiting for” in verse 12. The word “wait” means to look forward to something.² It can also mean to wait with a sense of expectation, anxiety, or excitement (see Matt. 24:50). The lives of believers are to be marked by a posture of anticipation and looking for the return of Jesus.

This is an important concept because it is connected to godly and holy living of verse 11. In other words, those who take seriously the call to live righteously will be marked by waiting and looking for the coming of the Lord. This idea is so important that Peter uses it again in verse 13 and in verse 14.

*¹³ But according to his promise we are **waiting** for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are **waiting** for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 2 Peter 3:13–14 (ESV)*

In the Greek Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the word is used for trusting in God (Ps. 104:27) and hoping in His salvation (Ps. 119:166). So the sense here is that the heart is set on something such that it is what occupies the mind and the heart.

This is the time of year with many weddings, and I keep running into engaged couples who are counting down the days until they are married. In fact, I met one couple who was doing a countdown to their wedding by reading whatever Psalm corresponded to the number of days that were left. The waiting for their wedding occupied their minds and hearts every day. Their wedding day was so important that it easily became something that they thought about.

Are the New Heaven and the New Earth like that for you? I say that not just because heaven is beautiful and worthy of your attention and focus. It surely is. No, I say that because this kind of attention and focus is directly tied to godliness, righteousness, and diligence. In other words, keeping the “long view” of eternity in mind is fuel for godliness.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 389–390.

You see, the nature of temptation is to offer immediate and fleeting pleasures. And one of the strategies to take the luster off sin is to see how shallow it is. Oh, temptation offers joy, but not everlasting joy. Here is how the writer of Hebrews described this in reference to the life of Moses:

²⁵ *choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.* ²⁶ *He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.* Hebrews 11:25–26 (ESV)

What you look at and what you look for is what shapes your heart. The eyes reflect and shape the heart. That is why you need the Bible in your life, because it shapes what you wait for and what you look for. Psalm 119 is filled with passionate pleas for God to connect the Word of God with the eyes of mankind:

⁵ *Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!* ⁶ *Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.* Psalm 119:5–6 (ESV)

¹⁵ *I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.* Psalm 119:15 (ESV)

¹⁸ *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.* Psalm 119:18 (ESV)

³⁷ *Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.* Psalm 119:37 (ESV)

¹⁴⁸ *My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.* Psalm 119:148 (ESV)

Looking for and longing for the right things inclines you toward righteousness. And in some way it factors into the plan of God such that the more we wait, the sooner the Lord will return. Somehow our waiting hastens the Day of the God (v. 12).

Therefore, keep remembering and keep looking.

3) Live Righteously

The final charge in this text is the reason I chose this passage for the last sermon in this series. Verse 11 has gripped me for quite some time: ¹¹ *“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness . . .”* (2 Peter 3:11). I have been thinking about what kind of people we should be in light of what we have learned about heaven. Peter uses similar language in verse 14: ¹⁴ *“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace”* (2 Peter 3:14). Or, as I’ve put it before, “If heaven is like that, how do we live now?”

So we have a constellation of words, all pointing us a particular direction by implication of what heaven is like. In verse 11 we are told to be people with lives of holiness and godliness. This means that in light of the future, the lives of believers are to be marked by the character of God. In 2 Peter 1:5-7, he lists qualities like virtue or goodness, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, brotherly affection, and love. These confirm that we are true followers of Jesus, and they are characteristic of the eternal kingdom (see 2 Peter 1:10-11). Verse 14 is a restatement of the calling to be holy and godly in this age, but with the use of the phrase “without spot or blemish, and at peace.” To be at peace means that one is right with God,

having been forgiven by God through justification by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). And to be without spot or blemish means that a person's life is characterized by righteousness. Now this text is not saying that believers will be morally perfect. But there must be a necessary connection between what we believe about the future and how we live now.

In other words, knowing what the Bible says the future holds and understanding the judgment that is to come must have a direct effect on how a believer lives. Or it may be that the person does not really believe. Again, I'm not advocating for perfection or sinlessness. But if godliness and holiness are not a part of your life or your passion in life, then it may be that you know what the Bible says about heaven but you do not really believe what the Bible says. It is possible to know about Jesus but not believe in Him.

So it may be that this entire series is revealing to you that you need to believe in Jesus. Maybe you have come to realize the depth of your sin and brokenness. Perhaps you can sense God drawing you to Himself. Why not come to Christ today? Why not put your trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins? Why not believe in Him as your Lord and Savior and be at peace with God?

But there is more that we need to talk about here. Allow me to press into a few other applications.

First, you may be a believer in Jesus, but you have never gone public with your faith in Christ through baptism. Perhaps that is a step that you need to take now since it is commanded by Jesus and is the first of many steps of obedience.

Second, it also could be that you have not become a member of our church. If heaven is a gathered people, then the church is a foretaste of what that will be like. You need a people now, a body with whom you identify, who affirms your understanding of the gospel, holds you accountable, and communicates to the world what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

Third, perhaps this series has opened your eyes to how little you really desire or think about heavenly things. Maybe your mind and heart have not been seeking things that are above, and it could be that you need to confess that to the Lord and choose a new path that sets you on a new direction.

Fourth, understanding the glory of God in heaven can and should help us see what is really valuable, what is really lovely, and what is really worth pursuing. Remembering and meditating on the glory of God helps us to not pursue our own glory through pride or to pursue the fleeting glory of other sinful desires. When we seek the self-centered praise and affirmation of others, we are seeking glory. In our lustful desire for power and control, we are seeking glory. We are seeking glory when the image in the mirror becomes too important or when we are on the hunt and searching for nakedness around us. Let us remember what real glory is so that we can be a holy and godly people!

Fifth, if the New Heaven and the New Earth is the gathering of God's forever people in God's place and under God's rule, we should remember and celebrate the regular gathering of God's people on the Lord's day as a small taste of what heaven will be like. We should come regularly, expectantly, and with a focus to meet with our God, to seek His face, and to have our lives reordered under His rule.

Sixth, if God is gathering a forever people from every tribe, nation, and tongue (Rev. 7:9), and if all the nations of the world will bring their glory into New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:26), then we ought to realize that the church of Jesus Christ is made up even now of people from every ethnicity and racial background. The beauty and diversity of heaven demand that we put aside ethnocentrism and racism and that we work to love one another despite our different backgrounds, appearances, and experiences. Heaven is going to be beautiful, and so is the church when she looks more and more like heaven.

Seventh, if you really believe that the New Heaven and New Earth are real, and if you believe that your ultimate reality and reward is there, then it should be reflected in how you give. Jesus said to lay up treasures in heaven and that there is a connection between your heart and where your treasure is (Matt. 6:19-21). In other words, a failure to give is a statement of what you really believe about heaven.

Eighth, since our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) we can live as good citizens of this country while not wrapping our affections too tightly around the rise or fall of the United States. Don't get me wrong: You should absolutely be engaged in helping our republic to reflect biblical values. You should pray for your leaders, vote, express your concern and opinion in a winsome and articulate way, dialogue with people with whom you disagree, and seek to be in a place where you can help shape the culture – like Daniel. And yet as you do, be sure you remember that your real home is not here, and your real king does not reside in Washington, D.C.

Ninth, when suffering or persecution comes, we can be godly people who rejoice in hardship and mistreatment because of the glory that awaits us. When you understand what heaven will be like and the glory you will receive, you can join Job in saying, “Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21) as you suffer. Or, when you pay dearly for being a follower of Jesus, you can join the disciples and rejoice that you were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name (Acts 5:41).

And tenth, heaven matters for daily godliness in that your love for Jesus creates a longing to be like Him even now. It means that you see the vision of the future, and something within you says, “Yes! I can't wait for that day, and I want to get started being like Jesus even now!” So I leave you and this series with the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:8–11 (ESV)

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