

Finally Home: What Heaven Means for Earth

Perfection

Romans 8:28-30; Revelation 21:5-8

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²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:28–30 (ESV)

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Revelation 21:5–8 (ESV)

It will not be long before summer will be here. For many of us, the months of June and July will include some time when we will be away from home—perhaps on vacation, visiting family, traveling on a vision trip or maybe going to camp. Regardless of what you are doing this summer, I would guess that there is a certain point where you will find yourself thinking or saying, “I can’t wait to be home.”

Maybe you do not sleep well anywhere but in your bed, with your pillow. Or maybe you have a pet that is dear to you. Or maybe you just like the familiarity, the smells, and your favorite chair where you drink your morning coffee in your home. Or perhaps your traveling will take you away from loved ones or family members. If you are a parent sending one of your younger children off to camp this summer, you know that this issue is really important because often children feel this more strongly than anyone.

In fact, we even have a word for it, especially with children: homesickness. However, children are not the only ones who feel homesick. Frankly they are just more open about it because it is socially acceptable to be homesick when you are at summer camp but not so much if you are a Marine at boot camp.

To be homesick means that you feel an emotional ache or some level of sadness because of your separation from your home. I was reading an article on this subject, and it said something that I found very insightful:

We get homesick because there are things that we love . . . it's the byproduct of the strength of our attachment. If there were nothing in the world we were attached to, then we wouldn't miss them when we're away.¹

Homesick for Heaven

I think that is true, but I hope that it is true in a new way if you have been a part of this sermon series for the last five weeks. My prayer has been that there would be a new “attachment” that might be developed in your life. I hope that by talking about heaven, the final state or what it means to live on the New Earth, there will be new ache in your soul for what is yet to come. I hope that you have been able to see some things in the Bible that in turn have created new longings, desires, and a sense of anticipation.

So far we have looked at 1) what it means to set our minds on things above, 2) the beauty of God’s glory, 3) the hope of the resurrection, and 4) what the New Heaven and New Earth will be like. I know that I’ve not been able to answer all of your questions, but I do hope that you have thought and talked about heaven more in the last month than you have in the last few years.

But, even more, I hope that you feel something different when you think about heaven. I hope that there is a new attachment to the things of “heaven” and that you find yourself a bit homesick for heaven. I hope that you have a new longing to say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20 – KJV).

All Things New

Last week we walked through Revelation 21-22, and I tried to show you how the New Heaven and the New Earth are essentially about God’s forever people living in God’s forever place under God’s forever rule. As we walked through the text last week we sort of skipped Revelation 21:5-8 because I wanted to come back and focus on it and a very important theme that emerges.

Verse 5 contains a stunning proclamation from the throne: *“Behold, I am making all things new.”* The word “behold” is a marker for something important and remarkable. A few verse earlier (21:3), we heard this word announce that God’s dwelling place was going to be with man – *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”* That was a glorious announcement regarding the Creator and His redeemed creatures being reunited again.

The proclamation about newness is far more significant than what you might realize just by reading Revelation 21:3. John unpacks it a little bit by talking about the one who is thirsty in verse 6, the One who conquers in verse 7, and the contrast of who is not a part of this newness in verse 8. But it would hard to overestimate the importance of the statement *“I am making all things new”* because this is the ultimate goal of redemption.

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/08/16/homesickness.not.about.home/>

God announces that He is making everything perfect. What does this look like for God's people? It means everything wholly wrong is removed and everything wholly right will be received.² It means a restoration back to the Garden of Eden in terms of fellowship with God but with one very important exception: humans will no longer have the ability to sin. Those who know Christ will be perfected. They will be new.

This newness will be characterized by no tears, no death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain. And as beautiful and as marvelous as that is, there is more. This newness means that what Jesus is, they are. His glory is their glory. His power is their power. His rule is their rule. It is the hope and the promise of 1 John 3:2.

*² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him**, because we shall see him as he is.*

Don't miss the weight of those words! Let them sink in: "... *we shall be like him.*" Sinful, created, and mortal human beings are like Him! The followers of Jesus are counted as brothers with Christ.

*²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might **be the firstborn among many brothers.** (Romans 8:29)*

This is the moment when a believer's positional perfection because of justification becomes complete and total. Their sanctification matches their justification. Their life matches their spiritual position. They are perfect or, in theological terms, glorified.

What is Glorification?

I want to spend some time unpacking this theological category called glorification to help you see its connection to the New Heaven and the New Earth. And in order to do so, we'll need to examine a number of passages in the Bible.

Let's start with a definition. By glorification we mean that a Christian's whole being—body and soul—reflects the glory and image of Jesus Christ.³ It is the completion, the consummation, the perfection, the full realization of salvation ... the perfect, incontestable standing before God in the day of judgment ... the perfection of sanctification that pertains to one's inner character, self, and person.⁴ It is the full expression of a believer's union with Christ. It is sharing in the nature of the glorified and risen Christ.

So when Revelation says, "all things new," this is what the Bible has in mind. Glorification is a vital aspect of what the New Heaven and the New Earth are all about. It is a far more prevalent theme than you may realize, and it has a significant impact in how we think about what heaven means for earth. Let

² Thanks to Dustin Crowe for this concise insight.

³ This definition was developed by Luke Humphrey, one of our Pastoral Residents

⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 869.

me give you some characteristics of glorification and show you some places in the Bible where this issue appears.

1. An act of God

The first aspect of glorification relates to the question of how it happens. Where does glorification come from? The answer, very simply, is that glorification is something that God does. It is an act of the sovereign God of the universe.

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. (Revelation 21:5–6a)

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

The change that takes place in glorification is so radical and so transformational that it could only be accomplished by God Himself. The miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead now becomes the miracle of the total transformation of the people of God. And God is the one who does it.

2. The completion of the plan of redemption

The making all things new and the glorification of believers is the final step in God's redemptive plan. It is what the followers of Jesus are waiting and longing for. Justification is the immediate declaration of righteousness that God has already given to those who have put their trust in Jesus. When a person trusts Christ, he or she is declared righteous (Rom. 8:1). Full forgiveness and pardon are granted in the moment of receiving Christ, and the believer is granted the spiritual position of being "in Christ."

And yet there is still a practical and daily struggle with sin. Paul described this battle in Romans 7.

²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:22–24)

That is why glorification is still needed. Something marvelous happened in coming to faith in Christ. We were saved from our sins. Forgiven. And yet there is still more to come, and that is why Paul describes the order of salvation this way in Romans 8.

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

Glorification is the final step in redemption because it is the final victory that Jesus wins over all things that have been impacted by the curse of sin and death. Glorification is when all the enemies of God's rule are put under the feet of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:25). We are merely the objects of mercy under the

sovereign rule of a holy God. In other words, glorification is not ultimately about us; it is about the glory of God being displayed.

⁵ ... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:5–7)

3. The creation of new physical bodies

Central to glorification is the resurrection of our bodies from the grave. We talked extensively about this two weeks ago as we walked through 1 Corinthians 15, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this now except to point you again to the main thought in that chapter as it relates to heavenly glory.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power ... ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:42–43, 49)

Glorification involves a real and physical existence which reflects the beauty and glory of God. But what makes this eternal life so glorious is what is absent. In other words, glorification is glorious because of what is not present.

4. The final removal of the brokenness of sin

From a theological perspective, the victory of Christ means that death and sin have been defeated. Glorification is the evidence that Christ has won! Death and sin are gone.

⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54–55)

And when we turn to Revelation 21, we see very clear statements about what is not in God's presence:

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death ... ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life ... ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:3).

Everything that is contrary to the will, heart, and rule of God will be removed from the universe and from your mind and from your heart and from your body. Just imagine! No temptation, no impure motives, no mixed affections, no wrong desires, and nothing that refuses to submit to God's authority. Everything that is wrong with the world and everything wrong with you is gone!

5. A life of perfect holiness

Glorification means the completion of sanctification. What began when a person comes to faith in Christ and what they fought for throughout their life is now once-and-for-all complete!

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)

The completion of this work means that spiritual union of being “in Christ” is now a reality in a different way. Every part of our being is united with His, such that His holy nature becomes our holy nature.

⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:4)

Glorification means that we have been conformed to the image of Jesus, so much so that Jesus could be called “the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:29). We so look like Him that He seems like one of us! How scandalous and yet how glorious!

God makes us totally, 100 percent holy! And this goal is the reason for our election, our calling, and our justification. Jesus died in order to gather a people clothed in His righteousness (Eph. 5:27). Just imagine what it will be like when loving God and one another will be as natural and familiar as breathing is now. As core as our sinful brokenness is now, so our Christ-given holiness will be the essence of who we are. Glorification means that we will be perfectly holy forever!

6. Reflecting the glory of Jesus

The final characteristic of glorification is its connection to the glory of Jesus. Previously I’ve said that we are like Him. But we need to put some additional language on this aspect of reflecting the glory of Jesus.

In Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17 he said, “*The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one . . .*” (John 17:22). Jesus longed for them to see His glory and to share in it (John 17:24).

The glory of Jesus is the beauty of all that He is. And those who are united to Him will possess the same glory that belongs to Him. To belong to God means to share in this glory.

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16–17)

Glorification means that what emanates from Jesus emanates from us.

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21)

So do you understand why this particular promise is so important? I hope you can see that this theme of glorification is far more prevalent throughout the Bible than what you may have realized before. And I hope that something within you starts to feel a bit homesick for this reality. My prayer is that in seeing this promise in the Bible, you will long for the day when your whole being—soul and body—reflect the glory and image of Jesus.

Why does glorification matter?

We cannot leave this discussion with just the information about what glorification is like. As I looked at verse after verse, the practical application of glorification kept emerging. A survey of the verses that talk about glory clearly reveals a pattern of connecting future glory to how we live right now. Let me give you four implications:

1. It is the basis of hope, so point your heart toward it.

There is a reason why this doctrine is part of the New Heaven and New Earth. And there is a reason why we are told so much about this future glory. The promise of glorification creates hope.

² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Romans 5:2 (NRSV)

God is working out a plan for every believer's life, and it always ends—for every believer—in glory!

So, if you find yourself weary, discouraged, downcast, and sick of the brokenness in you and in the world, point your heart toward the glorification that awaits you. Pray that God would help you to turn your affections and your joy away from the temporal and the immediate. Pray that He helps you to love the glory of God even more so that you can boast in what God is going to do in you in the future.

2. It is where sanctification leads, so fight hard and rest assured.

In Romans 8 we learned that God's redemptive plan leads to glorification. Justification leads to sanctification, which leads to glorification. In other words, you were saved from your sins so that you would live out an imperfect righteousness now with the grand hope that one day God will complete the work. So we fight sin with all our might.

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

And while we fight, we do so knowing that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). So we fight hard—really hard—while resting in the promise that one day God will bring our holiness to completion.

3. It is what we taste now in part, so rejoice in what is to come.

The apostle Paul tells us that the process of glorification through sanctification has already begun. The Spirit is beginning to create levels of “glory” in us already.

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

So as we are able to see that process worked out in our lives, and as we see righteousness gaining a stronger and stronger footing in our lives, it serves to strengthen our faith and joy in what is yet to come. Transformation in this life whets our appetite for what is yet to come.

4. It is the fuel of endurance, so do not lose heart.

It is striking how often not losing heart is connected to the promise of glorification. The hope of future glory becomes the fuel of endurance.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. ¹ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. (2 Corinthians 3:18–4:1)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... (2 Corinthians 4:16–17)

Do you see it? What does heaven mean for earth? It means that trials, difficulties, losses, and struggles can be seen through a lens of future glory. It means that we can joyfully endure the pain and challenges now because we have set our sights on another kind of glory.

The Bible intends to make us homesick for our future glory so that we will be more attached to what is to come and be less attached to what is in this lifetime. The Bible gives us a vision of what true glory is all about. It shows us what “really living” really is.

Glorification is more than just a future state; it is a compelling promise that is meant to redefine what you love, what you are living for, and what is worth dying for. Glorification is both our hope and our motivation to live on earth as citizens of heaven.

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