

Heaven, Part 1: Looking Forward to a New Earth

I've been asked to bring two messages on the subject of **Heaven**. We'll begin today and conclude next weekend.

Read Rev. 21:1-6 “everything new.”

Pray: Father, *I am wholly inadequate* to convey the truths of your Word, with the accuracy and depth they deserve. You promise **your Word will not return to you empty without accomplishing the purpose for which you have sent it.** Please accomplish that purpose in our minds and hearts now. Please **cleanse me and cleanse each of us** of everything that could get in the way of your truth. Take hold of us, Lord. Break through the lies, untwist the distortions of the evil one **who has vested interests in our not seeing the truth about Heaven...because he hates you and he hates us.** We desperately **need to hear from you.** We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

 In 1952, a young woman named **Florence Chadwick** stepped off **Catalina Island**, into the **Pacific Ocean**. Her goal was to **swim to the shore of mainland California, 21 miles away.**

It was **foggy and chilly**. She could **barely see the boats** alongside her. Florence swam for fifteen hours. She begged to be taken out of the water. Her mother, in a boat alongside, told her she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, **she gave up and stopped swimming.** They pulled her out. Then, when Florence Chadwick was on the boat she discovered the truth: **the shore was less than half a mile away.** She was 98% of the way home.

At a news conference the next day she said this: “**All I could see was the fog . . . I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.**”

Can you relate to those words? We live our lives in a fog of trouble, worry, doubt, depression, health problems, unemployment, financial uncertainty, strained relationships...and loss of loved ones.

We have times of joy and celebration. But let's face it—we live in a world of struggle, suffering, and death...the devastation of the **earthquake and tsunami** in southern Asia has been a terrible reminder. (Jonathan Martin asked me to mention that there is **information about the best ministries to give to help** in that crisis—see our website at epm.org.) Our problems may be small compared to theirs. But some of us here have faced **personal earthquakes and emotional tsunamis** in the last year. *Thursday night* the men in our community life group prayed, and there was **so much to pray for, so much we long to see fixed.**

All these things **create a fog**. It's **difficult to see in front of us**. We end up **focusing on the fog because we can't see the shore**. Sometimes we feel like giving up because **we don't have the strength to stay afloat any longer**. This is where **the people of God throughout the ages** had a source of strength and perspective that for some reason we don't talk much about today: **Heaven**. It was **their north star** by which they could navigate their lives. **It was their great reference point**. But **Heaven has fallen off our radar screens today**. We don't know where we are and we **do not know where we are going**.

The apostle Paul faced **hardship, beatings and imprisonment**. He said,

π **One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

π **Philippians 3:13-14**

Paul knew where he was going. He was moving heavenward. As a runner sets his eyes on the finish line, **Paul set his eyes on Heaven**. He was able to **see the shore**. My prayer is that in these two messages **God would help us to see the shore**. That's why I have written several books about **Heaven**: that we might see the shore, **that Heaven might become as real in our thinking as it truly is.**

The Bible tells us that if we know Jesus Christ we are headed toward Heaven. A world where there will be “**no more death**” and “**no more mourning**” “**no more crying or pain**.” God will wipe away the tears from every eyes. **That world awaits us on the other side of all this fog that surrounds us.**

- Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

○ Colossians 3:1-2

Consider Florence Chadwick's words: "I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."

For Christians, that shore is a person called Jesus and a place called Heaven. **We are made for a person and a place.** Jesus is the person. Heaven is the place. They are the reference points. You can't separate them. **You can't get Heaven without getting Jesus.** You can't get Jesus without getting Heaven.

We live in a world that is broken. Terribly broken, as Sumatra and Sri Lanka has reminded us. We can't fix this world. But the Bible promises us that **Christ isn't going to leave the world broken. He's going to fix it.** Permanently, so that **it will never break again.**

Christ is **not just going to fix our spirits. He's going to fix our bodies.** (Does your **body need fixing?** Does your **mind need fixing?**) He's not just going to fix individuals, **he's going to fix the society of human beings**, our relationships and our **work and our recreation and arts and culture.** And **he's not just going to fix society, he's going to fix the earth itself**—nature and forests and **the animal kingdom, all of it.**

God's redemptive plan is **far bigger than we have imagined.**

If you are a Christian, if you have repented and confessed your sin and asked Jesus to be your Savior, then **Heaven awaits you**, on the other side of death.

First question: What is Heaven, or where is Heaven? **God is everywhere, but Heaven is the special dwelling place of God.** There's confusion on this point, because **God's special dwelling place will change**—therefore Heaven will be relocated.

First, **there is the place Christians go when we die**, which theologians call **the intermediate heaven**. This is **before the return of Christ**, and **before the resurrection** of our bodies, **before the curse is lifted** from this present world.

Second, there is the place we will live **after the return of Christ, after the resurrection: the eternal heaven, which is called the New Earth.**

Some Christians believe that after Christ returns there will be **a literal thousand year reign of Christ on the old Earth. This is called the millennium.** I believe there will be a millennium. But whether or not you believe in a literal millennial reign, Christians agree that **the Bible teaches that there will be a New Earth:**

π **In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.**

π **2 Peter 3:13**

Are **you** looking forward to that new physical universe, **characterized by righteousness?** This verse assumes we're looking forward to that—naturally, we would be. Yet **many of us never think about it!**

Now let's talk about this place theologians call **the intermediate Heaven**, where Christians **go when we die:**

π **To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.**

π **Philippians 1:21, 23**

Paul could have said “I desire to depart and be in Heaven.” No, what he wants is to be with Christ—and **where Christ is, HEAVEN IS. Christ is Heaven’s Center of Gravity.** All of Heaven’s joys are **derivative** from Christ. They all flow from the depth and wonders and creativity of his character. (More next week.)

Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross:

Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

π Luke 23:43

Notice the immediacy. Today. Not eventually. **No soul sleep.** The person who dies immediately and consciously goes to be with Jesus.

Think about it: what could the thief do to earn his way to Heaven? **Nothing!** He couldn't **give money or get baptized, work in a soup kitchen or go on a missions trip.** He had **nothing** to offer God. **We have nothing to offer God. He has everything to offer us.** This salvation thing is really one sided. Other religions have people working their way to God. **The Bible says you can't do that.** (Not very flattering. But it's a relief; because **it depends on Christ's righteousness, not yours or mine.**)

Jesus offered the thief Paradise. And that very moment **Jesus was purchasing Paradise for him.**

This word for **Paradise means a place of great natural beauty.** Yet many Christians don't think this way about Heaven. They think of it as vague and mystical, unsuitable for human beings, **largely disconnected** with this life.

One woman wrote to me, "I've been a Christian since I was five. I'm married to a youth pastor. When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to Heaven, I wouldn't know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. . . . It's been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this **fear of Heaven and eternal life.**"

Who would you suspect would be behind making a Christian terrified of dying and fearful of Heaven and eternal life? Who has motive, means and opportunity? The devil, who was evicted from heaven, who Jesus called **the father of lies.** He

wants us to find no joy in anticipating Heaven; no motive to share the good news that Jesus went to the cross so we could be with Him in Heaven forever.

A pastor, a seminary graduate, said to me, "Whenever I think about heaven, it makes me depressed. I'd rather cease to exist when I die. I can't stand the thought of endless boring tedium. Heaven doesn't sound much better than hell."

This man, a godly brother, was just being honest. He'd been to seminary, but he'd picked up a view of Heaven that isn't in the Bible, but is out there in culture, like the Far Side Cartoon where a man's in heaven sitting doing nothing on a cloud and saying "I wish I'd brought a magazine." Who would want to go to a place like that? Who would want to share the gospel—so they can go to a boring dreadful place!!

Mark Twain put these words in the mouth of Huck Finn:

[The Widow Douglass] went on and told me all about the good place [heaven]. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. . . . I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, *not by a considerable sight*. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.

It's sort of cute, but it's really a SAD view of Heaven, isn't it? Mark Twain was a great writer, but when it came to Heaven and to Jesus, he never got it.

Contrast this with the apostle Paul, who according to 2 Corinthians 12 had actually been caught up into heaven or Paradise:

π ...the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.

π 2 Timothy 4:6-8

π “the time has come for my departure” (*analousis*, to loosen)

1. Loosening ox from yoke or cart.
2. Pulling up tent stakes for travel.
3. Untying ship from dock, to let sail.
4. Unchaining a prisoner.
5. Solving a problem.

This is a very positive picture. **Death is not a hole, it's a doorway**, it's not an end to life, but a passing to a new life. **The best is not behind us, if we know Jesus. The best, by far, is yet ahead of us.**

Early in the second century, a Greek philosopher, **Aristides**, a nonchristian, wrote to his King about the behavior of Christians:

π If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.

π **Aristides, AD 125**

A few of us, at memorial services, have read this depiction of a believer's death:

I'm standing on the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She's an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and the sky come down to mingle with each other. And then I hear someone at my side saying, "There, she's gone."

Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side. And just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There, she's gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!"

And that, for the Christian, is dying.

There is bad news about dying, but **there is very great news:**

π Since the children have flesh and blood, Christ too shared in their humanity so that *by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death*—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

π Hebrews 2:14-15

What a promise. Christ came to deliver us from the fear of death. **Why shouldn't we fear death?**

π God will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

π Isaiah 25:7-8

Tolkien's **Return of the King**, the **destruction of Mordor**, the death of Sauron.

π The trumpet will sound, *the dead will be raised imperishable...then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory.*

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

π **1 Corinthians 15:55**

Death will not win. Death will die. Death will be reversed. This is the promise of resurrection. **Not that we'll be disembodied spirits**, but that we'll be physical and spiritual people. Cyprian said this in the third century:

π **Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to Paradise and the kingdom. Anyone who has been in foreign lands longs to return to his own native land.... We regard Paradise as our native land.**

π **Cyprian, AD 250**

God has built into us a **Nostalgia for the world that once was**, before sin and curse and death and suffering. We are **Homesick for Eden**, for its beauties and pleasures and health and vibrant relationships. The Bible says our **citizenship is in Heaven, that Heaven is our home**. It's paradoxical, isn't it? **Our home is a place we've never been**. We live in a land in between Eden and the New Earth.

When the Bible says we sinned in Adam, it suggests we have an essential connection back to the Garden, to Paradise. **In a sense, the memories of Eden are built into us**, and that's why we can't be fully content with anything less. The reason we want to live on an ideal earth is that **we were made to live on an ideal earth**. The reason we long to have enriching relationships with people is that **we were made to have them**. **We didn't make up this idea, God did**. We were made to know joy...yet we end up desperately searching for joy in all the wrong places, and finding instead **addictions** and **hollowness** and **misery**.

π **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...God 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. “No longer will there be any curse.”

π **Revelation 21:1,4; 22:3**

π **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is *with men*, and he will live *with them*. They will be his people, and God himself will be *with them* and be their God.”**

π **Revelation 21:1-3**

Where Jesus is, there Heaven will be. It’s profound, but it’s really very simple. Here it is. The incarnation and resurrection of Christ will continue forever. It’s not that Jesus became a baby at Christmas, and then 33 years later came the resurrection and ascension and then he stopped being a man. **No, the second member of the triune God will be a human being for all eternity.** Now, really we should be stunned by that. But we have to move on...

We will be with Him, **resurrected people living with the resurrected Christ.** Physically resurrected people need a physical place to live. ***That physical place will be the New Earth.***

Think about what this means. Often we think of Heaven as *our going up into an angelic realm to live with God in his place*. But in fact, the Bible says the ultimate Heaven, will be **God coming down from His place to live with us in our place—the New Earth.** That’s the place He’s making for us.

Christ’s name **Immanuel** does not mean “us with God.” Immanuel means “**God with us.**” **Where will He be with us?** On the new earth.

We’ve heard it said, “**This world is not our home.**” It’s true, but it’s a half truth. We should qualify it to say “This world—**as it now is, under the curse**—is not our home.”

But we should also say, “This world—**as it once was**, before sin and curse—was our home.” And we should add, “This world—**as it one day will be**, delivered from the curse—will be our home.”

In the intermediate Heaven, we'll be with Christ, and we'll be joyful. **But it won't be our permanent home.** We'll be looking forward to our bodily **resurrection and relocation** to the New Earth. (**Our loved ones won't go to New Earth before we get there. We'll go together to colonize the New Earth!**)

Of Americans who believe in a resurrection of the dead, **two-thirds believe they will not have bodies after the resurrection.** But that's self-contradictory. A **non-physical resurrection is like a sunless sunrise.** There's no such thing. Resurrection *means* that we will have bodies. **If we didn't have bodies, we wouldn't be resurrected!**

The Bible is never content with a disembodied state. That fits with **Platonism** and **Eastern Mysticism**, but it does not fit with Christianity. 1 Corinthians 15 says if there is no resurrection, we are of all men most to be pitied.

We have fallen for the lie that the physical creation is bad or inferior and unspiritual. But that's a heresy—in 1 Timothy 4 it's called a **doctrine of demons.** God created the material universe, called it very good. **Jesus went to the cross not only to redeem us, but to redeem the earth and the material universe itself.** (**Romans 8** is clear on this, as we'll see next week.)

Here's an analogy to illustrate **the difference** between the intermediate Heaven and the eternal Heaven. Suppose you lived in **a homeless shelter in Miami.** One day you inherit a beautiful house, on a gorgeous hillside overlooking **Santa Barbara, California.** You pack your bags.

On your flight to Santa Barbara, **you'll change planes in Dallas**, where you'll spend an afternoon. Some family members you haven't seen in years, will meet you at the Dallas airport. You'll spend some time together, then **board the plane together for Santa Barbara.** You look forward to seeing them.

Now, when the Miami ticket agent asks you, "What's your destination?" would you say "Dallas"? No. **You would say Santa Barbara, because that's your final or ultimate destination.** If you mentioned Dallas at all, you would only say, "**I'm going to Santa Barbara by way of Dallas.**"

Similarly, we are going to the New Earth, **by way of the intermediate Heaven**. That's where our brief layover is. **That's where we'll be until the resurrection.**

When you talk to your friends in Miami about where you're going to live, would you focus on Dallas? No. **Dallas is just a stop along the way. Your true destination—your new permanent home—is Santa Barbara.**

Similarly, **the Heaven we go to when we die is a temporary dwelling place**, a stop along the way. **It's a great place** (much better than the Dallas airport). But **it's a layover** on the way to our final destination: the New Earth.

Another analogy is more accurate, but difficult to grasp. Imagine leaving the homeless shelter in Miami and flying to Dallas, and then turning around and **going back home to a completely renovated New Miami**. In this New Miami, you'll no longer live in a homeless shelter, but **in a beautiful house** in a glorious pollution-free, crime-free, sin-free (**humidity free**) city. So you would end up living in a new home that's **a radically improved version of your old home**.

This is what the Bible promises us—we will live with Christ and each other forever, not in the intermediate Heaven, but on the New Earth, where God will come down to dwell with his people. Where **resurrected people will live with the resurrected Christ for all eternity**.

The first verse of the Bible says:

π **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

π **Genesis 1:1**

π **[click on] Behold, I will create *new* heavens and a *new* earth.**

π **Isaiah 65:17**

π “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure.”

π Isaiah 66:22

π In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

π 2 Peter 3:13

π [click on] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

π Revelation 21:1

What IS a new earth? Not a difficult question. New is the *adjective* that modifies the noun EARTH. A new earth is **an earth that is made new**, or an earth that is renewed. We just started **a new year**. The new year is new, but in *most critical respects it is like the old year, but with new twists*. **A new year is NOT a non-year.** **The new earth will be righteous, and that's the heart of its newness**—no more sin and curse and death. It will be earth as God meant it to be. **It will be this same earth, but this same earth transformed into something new.** A New Earth is not a Non-earth, but an Earth restored to its original state.

This **doctrine of continuity** is central to Scripture. We die and give an account of our lives. We can only do that if we're the same people, with memories:

π I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

π Job 19:25-27

If you are a Christian 2 Cor. 5:17 says you're **a new person in Christ**. That happened to me when I was in high school. But the day after I became a Christian **my mother still called me Randy**. I wore the same clothes, played on the same teams, rode the same bike. **My dog didn't growl at me because I was a stranger.** It wasn't **invasion of the body snatchers**. I was not a different person, but I was a new person—**the same person changed**. There was a continuity in my identity, from the old life to the new. I was a changed Randy, but I was still Randy. Likewise, when I die, I will be **Randy without the bad parts**, but I will still be myself.

In the resurrection we're told we will have **new bodies. Not non-bodies, but new bodies**. But God will not make a body that never before existed—**He will resurrect our old bodies**, from the atoms, molecules, DNA. Job said, **I myself...I and not another.** Continuity.

In just the same way, **the New Earth will still be earth**. What else would it be? Will the NEW earth be changed from this earth? Sure. The old order of things will pass away and **all things made new**. But what is the old order—it is the **curse, death, suffering**. The earth will be new above all because it will have all the bad stuff taken away. As the new Randy will be Randy without the bad stuff, **the new earth will be earth without the bad stuff**.

We'll get into this more next week and I wish I could just talk about the New Earth and nothing else. But at this point I must include a warning.

A Barna poll shows that **for every American who believes he's going to Hell, there are 120 who believe they're going to Heaven**.

Then **why did Christ say** in Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Why did Jesus say, “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.” **I didn't make that up. Jesus said it. I'm not his editor I'm just the messenger boy.**

We assume that people are good, so it shocks us that some people would go to Hell. If you asked an angel **he wouldn't be surprised at all that people would go to Hell.** *Where else would they go?* What shocks angels, I think, is that people go to Heaven!

Why would we go to Hell? Romans 3:23 says, “*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In the original Greek **all means all**, which is why the translators chose the word “all.”

God is so holy that he cannot allow sin into his presence. Sin separates us from God. **Because we are sinners, we cannot enter Heaven as we are.** God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay this way. **Christ came to change us.**

So Heaven is *not* our default destination. No one goes there automatically. **Unless our sin problem is resolved**, the only place we can go is **our true default destination . . . Hell.**

Judging by what's said at most funerals, you'd think nearly everyone's going to Heaven, wouldn't you? But Jesus said otherwise. Consider Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. A number of you saw the **made for TV movie**. Occasionally there was something in the book true to Scripture, but as a whole it was **a heaven without God**, and **a heaven everybody goes to automatically**. Why? Because, apparently, we're good enough.

The Bible says we are NOT good enough. Now, Hell has become a very unpopular subject and **many people get offended if you talk about it.** Some people say **“don’t talk about hell. Show people the love of Jesus.”**

But **who said more about hell than anyone in the Bible?** Jesus.

- π **Then he will say, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”**
π **Matthew 25:41**

- π **The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

By not talking about hell **do we think we're more loving than Jesus?** Do we think we're more Christ-like than Christ? **Who do we think we are?**

The best of life on Earth is a glimpse of Heaven; the worst of life on earth is a glimpse of Hell. **For believers in Christ, this present life is the closest they will come to Hell.** For unbelievers, **it's the closest they will come to Heaven.**

Consider the love of God: **He determined that he would rather go to Hell on our behalf than live in Heaven without us.** He so much wants us *not* to go to Hell that **he went to Hell for us on the cross** so that we wouldn't have to. (**Let's not point our fingers in accusation at such a God!**)

Apart from Christ, **our eternal future will be spent in Hell.** Like any gift, **forgiveness can be offered**, but it isn't ours until we receive it—and we can only do that through **repenting and confessing** our sins and receiving God's gift of salvation.

If you have not done that, you can do it quietly now. Or **talk to someone who would be glad to tell you about Jesus.** **If you are a Christian and would be glad to talk to someone about Jesus, raise your hand** (Go to one of these.)

I began the message by reading from Revelation 21.

π **[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain... "I am making everything new!" ...He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.**

π **Revelation 21:4-6**

Now we can return to subject of Heaven:

π **In my Father's house are many rooms [dwelling places].... I go to prepare a place for you.**

π **John 14:2**

Christ chose common, physical terms (*house, rooms, place*) to describe Heaven.

This place is not an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits. Humans aren't suited for such a realm. A *place* is by nature physical, just as human beings are by nature physical (not just spiritual). What we've been specifically designed for is the place God made for us: *Earth*. The ultimate place Christ is preparing for us is the New Earth. He's a carpenter, and He knows how to build!

Remind ourselves of God's original design of the Earth:

π Genesis 1:24 ff.

π And God said, "Let the land [earth] produce living creatures according to their kinds...And God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth..."

π ²⁷ So God created man in his own image...²⁸ God... said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the earth.... ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

π Genesis 2

π ⁷ The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground [earth] and breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life, and the man became a living being. ⁸
Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east,
in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹
And the LORD God made all kinds of trees

π ...that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life... A river watering the garden flowed from Eden... through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are there.)....**The LORD God put man in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

A world of natural wonders, trees with fruit, a great river, treasures in the forms of precious stones and minerals. And **God would come down to walk with them in the cool of the day.**

Then what? **Sin and death and curse, and people thrown out of Eden. It appears God loses, God will have to abandon his plan for physical men and women ruling a physical earth. But in Genesis 3 he promises a man will be born who will smash the serpent's head and reclaim a fallen world.**

What do we find in the last two chapters of the Bible? **A return to the first two chapters.** It talks about a great city, an architectural wonder with walls and gold and precious stones:

π **Rev. 21:24 The NATIONS will walk by [the Lamb's] light, and the KINGS OF THE EARTH will bring their splendor into [the city]. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut...26 The glory and honor of the NATIONS will be brought into it22:1 the river of the water of life...flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle**

This is culture!!! People of every tribe, nation and language.

π of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the NATIONS. 3 No longer will there be any curse. [God's] servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face.... 5 And they will reign for ever and ever.

Forever and ever: NOT the millennium!!

To reign means to rule, to have dominion. *Sound familiar?* Exactly what God told the first man and woman he wanted to do. Rule the earth, and steward the creation and care for the animals and be God's image bearers who create and invent and utilize resources and make art and music and technology and culture to the glory of God.

Satan will not thwart God's plan for righteous humanity to rule the earth!

In your bulletin is a chart that will help you see that God's creation is fulfilled.

π People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

π Hebrews 11:14-16

Are you longing for a better country? If you love Jesus, and you long for God's country, Heaven, then God is not ashamed to be called your God...and he has prepared a city for you.

Next week we'll continue. I'll conclude with a poem written by Calvin Miller:

π **Calvin Miller:**
π I once scorned ev'ry fearful thought of death,

π When it was but the end of pulse and breath,
π But now my eyes have seen that past the pain
π There is a world that's waiting to be claimed.

π Earthmaker, Holy, let me now depart,
π For living's such a temporary art.
π And dying is but getting dressed for God,
π Our graves are merely doorways cut in sod.

Final prayer:

Father, thank you for your promise that **Jesus has paid the way to Heaven**. Help us to long for this place. **For any who have not confessed and repented of their sins, and embraced your gift of eternal life, I pray you would draw them to yourself**. For those of us who know you, Lord, **help us to see the shore**; help us to set our minds on heaven. **Help us to long for that better country**—and know that the Carpenter from Nazareth, the God who will be a man forever, is preparing for us a magnificent place **on a resurrected Earth**, where we'll live together **as resurrected people with our resurrected Jesus**.