

October 30th, 2016

—THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING—

## GLORY

Revelation 21:1-5

This is the last message in our series on the gospel changes everything. If you've missed any of the messages in this series, I would just point you to our website [thewellboise.com](http://thewellboise.com) to listen. Personally, I have been deeply challenged by the ideas that have been presented. We've been using the rubric of creation-fall-redemption-glory to help us shape a proper Christian worldview.

### Glory

This morning we are looking at our last component: glory. Where is all of this going? How does this story finally end? The last two chapters of the Bible give us a picture of heaven that is *radically* different than many of our contemporary misimagination of it.

We find ourselves stuck between two very unattractive extremes. On the one hand we have books like *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* which tells the story of a man who was marginalized in this life. When he goes to heaven, he discovers that he was more like George Bailey from "It's a Wonderful Life" as he meets five people who convince him that his life really mattered. Finally he's accepted. Finally he has meaning. Only this heaven has no Jesus Christ. No salvation by cross. No holy God, just one that is kind of there in the background. Heaven is man-centered.

On the other hand, we are presented with a heaven where Jesus Christ reigns but this Heaven is non-physical. All the pleasures of this world are gone, work is gone, celebrations are gone, we are forever destined to an unending church service, singing glorious hymns in a disembodied state floating in a non-physical realm. Gary Larson, the Far Side comic writer drew up a picture caricaturing this heaven with a man sitting on a cloud all by himself. The

caption underneath captured his inner thoughts: “Wish I’d brought a magazine.”<sup>1</sup>

Both of these extremes couldn’t be further from reality. The New Heavens and the New Earth is the climax of human history. After all mankind stands before the judgment seat of Christ and all accounts are settled, God creates a new heavens and a new earth, both *physical* (Rev. 22:1). He brings a *physical* city to the new earth—the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2). The dwelling place of God is finally and forever with man, where we will behold the resurrected and glorified Christ and all sorrow and sin will vanish. Forever. And then the great adventure begins. We will be Christ-worshipping, culture-building, universe-exploring, beauty-creating redeemed people.

### *The Big Idea...*

In Glory, we will have sinless resurrected bodies fulfilling the cultural mandate, all while enjoying the presence of God forever.

☆ Misimagining Heaven

☆ The Heaven that Christ Purchased

## I. Misimagining Heaven

Evangelical culture at large has adopted a wrong premise when it comes to imagining heaven. Many of us have bought into the notion that we are destined to a non-physical heaven in some sort of disembodied state. As orthodox evangelicals, we affirm the physical resurrection of the body—**John 5:28-29** “...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 6-7

and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” And yet somewhere along the line, many of us have a non-physical idea of heaven.<sup>2</sup> As Alcorn says

“Our doctrine dresses up men and women in bodies, then gives them no place to go. Instead of the New Earth as our eternal home, we offer an intangible and utterly unfamiliar Heaven that’s the opposite of home. No wonder there is such an ambivalence and uneasiness about Heaven in our churches.”<sup>3</sup>

### Christoplatonism

Where do evangelicals get this notion that heaven—our final destination—will be non-physical? One author has said it is because we have adopted the worldview that he coined “**Christoplatonism.**” Many of Plato’s thoughts are gifts of common grace to all humanity, yet since he wasn’t grounded in Scripture, his views led to a dualism between the material and spiritual. He had a saying “Soma sema” which means “a body, a tomb” and this asserted that humanity’s highest destiny was to be forever set free from the body.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul combatted these philosophical assumptions in his letters to the Corinthians, and the Apostle John combatted this philosophy in 1 John. And we still fight this influence today. It’s so appealing to modern Christians because it *seems* to take the spiritual high ground. **Christoplatonism** is the “...unbiblical belief (smuggled into Christian thought) that the spirit realm is good and the material world is bad.”<sup>5</sup>

And just as this view as showed itself in our creation and fall components, so it shows up in our glory component, by making heaven a completely spiritual place devoid of physicality. And it has infected even Reformed teachers that we

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<sup>2</sup> This is why it is so crucial to get the first three components of our worldview grid—creation, fall, and redemption—right. If we begin with a dualistic view of the universe, that the spiritual is good and that matter is bad, we will superimpose that on our idea of heaven.

<sup>3</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 457

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pg. 475

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, pg. 52

would consider orthodox. One such teacher<sup>6</sup> writes in his commentary on Revelation:

“When John speaks of streets paved with gold, a city whose gates are made of single pearls and the like, we must not understand that the heavenly city will be as *material* as present earthly cities.”<sup>7</sup>

Why should we *not* think of the heavenly city as material? Are we to spiritualize our resurrected bodies as well? What does it mean to be human?

This influence has gone so deep as to even condemn physical pleasures. Many evangelicals identify physical pleasure with evil. Remember that email that I read three weeks ago from that believer who asked if it was ok as a Christian to draw, or run, or sing? Where did they get that idea that those things were wrong? Who invented physical pleasure? Did good food, and sex, and friendship and laughter and celebration and work come after the fall? No God made all of those things before sin ever entered the world. The apostle Paul tells us that it is lying demons who tell us those physical pleasures are wrong. (1 Timothy 4:1-4)<sup>8</sup>

But what does Christoplatonism do? It tells us that physical pleasures are bad and creates a picture of an afterlife that is more akin to Eastern Mysticism than Biblical Christianity.<sup>9</sup> To be disembodied spirits floating in some ethereal

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris

<sup>7</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 456

<sup>8</sup> “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. **For everything created by God is good**, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”

<sup>9</sup> “In Greek mythology, Mount Olympus is an earthly Heaven, where gods indulge in scandalous behavior, making Heaven seem cheap and man-made. Islam portrays Heaven as a place where man is given countless concubines—promiscuity as an eternal reward. We rightly recoil at this. It may partly account for why some people resist the notion of a New Earth, assuming that earthliness somehow demeans God and Heaven.” Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 165

non-physical place is more a product of Buddhism not the Bible. And this view of Heaven for thinking human beings is very unattractive if we are honest. It has become a place where only those who have an intolerable life, such as the elderly, or handicapped, or those who are suffering or are persecuted might ever find attractive.<sup>10</sup> No wonder why so many evangelical children are not excited about heaven.

### Satan's Schemes

But Christoplatonism is not *merely* the product human beings. It is the product of Satan. One of Satan's attacks is against our view of Heaven. In Revelation 13:6, the NIV reads that Satan "...opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and *his dwelling place* and those who live in heaven."<sup>11</sup> Three things Satan slanders: 1) God; 2) the people of God and 3) Heaven. Why don't many evangelicals long for heaven? Because Satan has slandered it to their imaginations so that it is unappealing.

Mark Twain certainly drank deeply of this false view of Heaven. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck reports what the old Christian maid Miss Watson said about Heaven:

"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 with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it...I asked here 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."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, pg. 161

<sup>11</sup> The ESV supplies the words "that is" which are not found in the original (as opposed to the NIV and KJV) They are interpreting the dwelling place to be "those who live in heaven" making the three things that Satan blasphemes to be only two. This reading offers an alternative understanding of the passage. But in my estimation, it is certainly accurate that Satan attacks all three things constantly. cf Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), footnote on pg. 11

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, pg. 7

Who would want to go to that type of Heaven? If that is Heaven, than Joel Osteen is right, this is our best life now.<sup>13</sup> But what does the Scripture say?

## II. The Heaven that Christ Purchased

Please turn with me to Revelation 21-22 (Pew Bible pg.) As we read this, pay close attention to how many times the apostle gives physical descriptions of the New Earth, and re-imagine it not as some spiritualized analogy, but as literal descriptions of what awaits us.

### Revelation 21-22

[1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “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. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

[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

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<sup>13</sup> “We do not desire to eat gravel.” That’s how Randy Alcorn put it. God did not give us appetites or natures to desire gravel. Our appetite is not any more fit for a disembodied existence in a non-physical heaven than it is to eat gravel. Human beings were made not as disembodied spirits but as a union of body and spirit, and when God made us that way, He said “very good.” And He designed us to live on a physical earth.

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.”

(The New Jerusalem)

[9] Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” [10] And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, [11] having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. [12] It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— [13] on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. [14] And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

[15] And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. **[skip to v.21]** And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

[22] And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. [23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. [24] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. [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.

**(Ch. 22)**

[1] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [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. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

I want to make three observations from this text.

**1) The repeated physicality of the New Earth**

This text makes mention of numerous physical realities. Cities, gates, streets, rivers, foundations, walls, earth, heavens, water, mountains, measurements, precious stones, nations, kings, trees, fruit. The most repeated reality being the city (12 times). What do we find in cities? Buildings, bridges, parks, streets, businesses, fountains, restaurants, art museums, zoos, skyscrapers, athletic arenas, concert halls. If those realities aren't in the New Jerusalem, in what sense could John call it a city? Furthermore, where would we, will with our resurrected bodies, live if not in a physical place?

But let us not restrict the New Earth to one city. To be sure the New Jerusalem is the capital city, but notice in 21:24-25, kings are coming from other parts of the earth through the open gates. Jesus tells us in the parable of the ten minas in **Luke 19:17**, that the faithful servant received authority over ten cities.

“Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have **authority** over **ten cities.**” The New Jerusalem will be surrounded by other cities.<sup>14</sup>

In creation, God made the physical earth and said it was very good (Genesis 1:31). And even after the fall, He calls everything He created “good” (1 Timothy 4:4). In redemption, God stamps His good pleasure on physicality when Jesus Christ took on flesh forever. And He will be there in the physical city of the New Jerusalem on the physical New Earth.

## 2) Old things have passed away

Look at the end of v.4 in chapter 21 “the former things have passed away.” What former things have passed away? v.1 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. v.2 speaks of a city. John is not saying that all physicality is rubbed out of existence. Look at the context of v.4. “He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, **for** the former things have passed away.” It is sin and the effects of sin that will have finally passed away. That is what Jesus purchased on the cross—eternal freedom from sin and its curse.

In v.1 when John says that the first heaven and the first earth passed away, he means that they will pass away like our old bodies will pass away to give way to our glorious resurrected bodies. **There’s a continuity and a discontinuity.** There’s a continuity in that our new bodies will really be us, and there’s a discontinuity in that they will be glorified. God will not totally annihilate this universe and start over. It will be glorified. That’s what Paul meant in **Romans 8:22** “For we know that the whole creation has been growing together in the **pains of childbirth** until now.”

When mommas are in the pains of labor, what are we expecting will happen? The birth of a human being. The earth is in labor pains—in all it’s

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<sup>14</sup> Furthermore when Jesus was comforting His disciples in the upper room, what did He comfort them with? The promise of a place being prepared for them and us. John 14:1-3 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

earthquakes, and tsunamis, and hurricanes, and famines. Those are labor pains brought on by the terrible effects of sin. But it's going to give birth to a new heavens and a new earth. There's the continuity. But there's discontinuity, because it will not longer be subjected to the futility of sin brought on by the human race. God is not scraping His creation.<sup>15</sup> As Albert Wolters says in his book *Creation Regained* “[God] hangs on to his fallen original creation and salvages it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands—in fact, he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project.”<sup>16</sup>

### 3) The Cultural Mandate will continue on the New Earth

Recall that the cultural mandate was what we saw in Genesis 1:28 “...“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion.” Meaning mankind was commissioned by God to develop both the **natural world** “...plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music” and the **social world**—build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws.”<sup>17</sup> These constitute man’s God-ordained tasks. God made us to be creators and rulers. And *the part* that many of us miss, is that these tasks—this work—was part of paradise! Before the fall! It was part of God’s very good plan that we would be working. Not working exclusively, because God instituted rest as well, but working nonetheless.

Part of our problem is that we’ve never worked on this side of Heaven apart from the curse, and so we often associate work with a necessary evil. But

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<sup>15</sup> An objection might be raised at this point from the text in 2 Peter 3:7 which says “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly” (also cf. v.10) So, the objection may go, that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire. But that is not what it says nor necessarily demands. Fire is used in Scripture often times for refining. In fact, Peter uses it this way in his own letters (cf. 1 Peter 1:6-7). So I understand this fire to be a refining fire, not a destroying fire, and this would be more consistent with the parallel between our bodies now and our resurrected bodies then. We are not completely different people. There is a continuity and a discontinuity.

<sup>16</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), footnote on pg. 89

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2008), pg. 47

haven't you ever had one of those days where *almost* everything went right? You met all your deadlines, your co-workers and you were working in harmony, you got the bad guys, you put out the fire and nobody got hurt, or all the strokes of your hammer were perfectly placed? Or for you stay at home moms, all your children were mostly cooperating, you cleaned your house, and you had supper on the table at just the right time? What do we feel at the end of those days? Fulfillment. Why? Because that's how God designed us. Those are foretastes of the fulfilling work in Heaven minus all the sin. To work is part of what it means to be an image bearer of God. Jesus said in John 5:17 "My Father is working until now, and I am working." God gave us work as a gift, and it is a part of our forever happiness. As Tim Keller says:

"Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, and prayer...it is not simply medicine, but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness."<sup>18</sup>

Now with that in mind look at the activity that is happening on the New Earth in 21:24-26. "By its light (the light of the Lamb) will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring **their glory** into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the **glory and the honor of the nations.**" What does John mean here? Certainly it includes song and shouts and proclamations to Jesus' great glory, but is that all it means? Wouldn't it include also their cultural developments?<sup>19</sup> Look at v26 again "They will bring into it the **glory and the honor of the nations.**" God made men to be creators, and artists, and engineers and adventurers, and explorers, businessmen, and His gifts and callings are irrevocable (**Romans 11:29**). Is it not possible that they are bringing their creative treasures into the

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 37

<sup>19</sup> "Because of man's fall into sin, that cultural mandate has never been carried out in the way God intended. Only on the new earth will it be perfectly and sinlessly fulfilled." Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.,: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 414

city of the great King as tribute? To show Jesus how they have stewarded His New Earth, so they can hear “Well done, good and faithful servant?”

**Ephesians 2:10** says “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Does that only count for this life only? Or has God prepared for us a New Earth in which we will walk in good works for all eternity? Building culture, making new inventions, exploring the furthest reaches of the universe, going on adventures never dreamed of. Imagine the creativity that awaits us. Civilization has barely been born. It’s in it’s infancy! Will you compose music? Will you produce music better than Beethoven did? What about athletics? Will you run with Eric Liddell and feel God’s pleasure as the wind hits your face? Will you invent new technology? Will you study the physics of the new universe? What books will you read? Or will you write your own? Will you be one of the ones in Luke 19 that Jesus appoints to rule over cities? Do you think there will be hunting in heaven? After all, Jesus ate fish after the resurrection. Which Bible character will you visit first? Will you paint, or sculpt, or learn a music instrument, or all of them? Will you climb mountains? What about business? Will you open a shop? The busy-ness of heaven will be intoxicated with creativity, such that any outside of Christ would be crushed by it.

### **One final objection**

At this point I can imagine someone saying, “Where is room for worship of Christ in all these activities. I though heaven was about worshipping Jesus.” This objection can only find ground in a dualistic Christoplatonic view of the universe. **In Heaven, everything we do will be worship.** There will be no material object, physical activity, or intellectual pursuit in heaven that is a competitor of God. All will serve as instruments that manifest His character to the watching universe.

Everything we do will flow like a river to the ocean of Christ's great glory. Finally we'll have eyes to see the things in the New Earth that we perhaps missed here. We'll fully see that:

“Flowers are beautiful for one reason—Christ is beautiful. Rainbows are stunning because Christ is stunning. Puppies are delightful because Christ is delightful. Sports are fun because Christ is fun. Study is rewarding because Christ is rewarding. Work is fulfilling because Christ is fulfilling.”<sup>20</sup>

All these activities and wonders will be opportunities of perfect worship. But that doesn't exclude directly gazing at the King. At times we will be among those kings rushing through the gates of the great city, the New Jerusalem, falling on our faces before Christ, in adoration and tears of joy, losing ourselves perhaps for days, doing nothing but singing and praising Him. “At other times” as one author says “...we'll worship him when we build a cabinet, paint a picture, cook a meal, talk with an old friend, take a walk, or throw a ball.”<sup>21</sup> Whenever man's creative activity is on display in Heaven, Christ is pleased because He is on display. And that is what will make all of our activity ultimately meaningful. Because we will be imaging forth the glory of Jesus Christ in activity under the sun.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 177

<sup>21</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 197

<sup>22</sup> “God's intention for humans was that we would occupy the whole Earth and reign over it. This dominion would produce God-exalting societies in which we would exercise the creativity, imagination, intellect, and skills befitting beings created in God's image, thereby manifesting his attributes. To be made in God's image involves a communicative mandate: that through our creative industry as God's subcreators, we should together make the invisible God visible, thus glorifying him in the sight of all creation.” *ibid*, pg. 226

# Application

## Our Doctrine: Heaven is the death of boredom

There are many more errors that people have arrived at when thinking about Heaven that are simply impossible to address in one sermon. Many of which deal with Scriptural misunderstandings. I think Randy Alcorn does a phenomenal job of dealing with many of them in his book *Heaven*.

I want to deal with just one grave error that kills evangelism and inflames discouragement and sin, and it's this: that heaven is boring. This is a heresy, because it necessarily means that God is boring. Anybody who thinks that God is boring has never read the Bible. This is the God who commands us to show hospitality to others. Is He going to be shown up by us when we are welcomed into His house? That's ludicrous. Who invented taste buds? Who invented adrenaline? Who invented sex? Who connected those nerve endings that run to our brain to tell us when something feels good? Now imagine all the pleasures that you have on planet earth stripped of their corruption and emptiness—if you can—and that is what Heaven will be like. Heaven is the death of boredom.

Luke 6:21 “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall **laugh**.” This world gives us plenty of reasons to weep here, but Jesus promises one day that we will laugh. Laughter will fill the streets of New Jerusalem. It's not enough for God that He would promise that all of our tears would be wiped away, He goes further promising us laughter. As C.S. Lewis said “Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”<sup>23</sup>

## Our Duty: We are to long for Heaven

God wants us to long for Him. To long for the time of consummation with eager hearts and outstretched arms. Hebrews 11 speaks of the saints of old who were seeking for their true homeland. They acknowledge that they were

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<sup>23</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 425

strangers and exiles on earth. v.16 says “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” God loves it when we long to be with Him in Heaven. Do you have this longing? Some of us, perhaps still have some hesitation to that question. Because we have a sense that we haven’t accomplished what we wanted to down here either do to lack of resources or time. We just haven’t met our goals. What do we do with that?

J.R.R. Tolkien faced a similar problem. When trying to complete his masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*, England was forced into WWII, and Tolkien was fifty. With Germany pounding at England’s door, Tolkien despaired of not being able to complete the project of his life. He awoke one day to see near his house cut down in it’s prime, and he internalized it imagining that he was going to suffer the same fate. But it sparked a short story in his mind which he wrote and send to the publishers entitled “Leaf by Niggle.” Niggle was a painter. His name means “to work...in a fiddling or ineffective way...to spend time unnecessarily on details.”<sup>24</sup> Anybody who knows anything about Tolkien knows that Niggle was Tolkien himself, who already spent decades on the languages, histories, and subplots behind Lord of the Rings. Well, as the story goes, Niggle the painter, was captivated in his mind’s eye with a tree. It was set in this wide open country with with white tipped mountains in the background. So he set to painting. But he hardly ever made any headway. First because he was such a perfectionist, that he would spend so much time on one leaf, getting the “shading and the sheen and the dewdrops on it just right.”<sup>25</sup> But second, because he was a kind hearted man who was always helping his needy neighbor. Because of these two things he never finished his painting. Before he died, he wept that his work was not finished. The only thing that was completed on his canvas was one single leaf. But Tolkien doesn’t end the story there. When Niggle entered his new and permanent country he found the tree. It was complete just as he

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<sup>24</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 26

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, pg. 27

imagined in every detail. He realized that his dream had not died at his death, but his work continued on in his real home.

Beloved, this life is not all there is. Our work has not yet even truly begun. Don't let unmet expectations stop you from longing for heaven now. God is infinitely concerned with our work both here and in the New Earth. "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (**Romans 11:29**) The reason why we should long for Heaven is because having an eternal perspective makes us of the best use now. Those saints in Hebrews 11, Abel, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, were faithful to God here on earth because they longed for Heaven. They sacrificed their goods, scorned the world, faced danger, the sword and death, because they longed for the better country and were willing to trade their lives for it.

## Our Delight: Christ purchased this Heaven for us

There would be no New Earth if Christ did not lift the curse. 22:3 says "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." Jesus reversed *everything* through His work. God told Adam after the fall, "...**cursed** is the ground because of you;" (Gen. 3:17) And now in the last chapter in Scripture we read "No longer will there be anything **accursed**." That's what the gospel had done. The gospel changes everything.

But the gospel must be believed. Nobody has the benefits of Christ until they cling to Him by faith. The Scripture promises that "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36)

Oh beloved look to what Christ has done. He was made poor so you could be rich. He was humiliated so you could be honored. He was treated like an enemy so you could be treated like sons and daughters. He obeyed in order to cover your disobedience. He was forsaken so that we could be accepted. He was damned so that we would be blessed. He took on Hell so that you could go

to Heaven. Oh how Christ loves His people. One day very soon we will see His face, and His name will be on our foreheads. And night will be no more.