

LIV. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“What Happens When I Die? (Part 7)

The Final State—The New Heavens and Earth”

II Peter 3:1–13

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We'll start by looking at Isaiah 66 which is the conclusion of this prophetic book. This will be the concluding study of what happens when we die and the place of our eternal existence is called the new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah 66:22–24 says [22] *“For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. [23] From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. [24] “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”*

Isaiah is opening up our subject. We have already dealt with the final state of the unbeliever which is being cast into the lake of fire, Gehenna. It is the place of everlasting punishment and that is anticipated in this text. This text like the rest of Scripture tells you in the affirmation of Hebrews 9:27, [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*, that there are only two destinations.

One of those destinations is the eternal condemnation of hell for the phrase ‘their worm shall not die’ is that they are ever conscious in their torment forever and ever. It is an everlasting existence and those who are cast into hell are also given an everlasting body that is tormented but yet never destroyed. The Scriptures are very clear in that regard. That is a place we don't want to be, it is a place we want to shun. It is our sins that carry us there but our God who is holy and just and brings that everlasting righteous judgment upon sin that is ultimate and eternal, has given us a way whereby we can be saved from our sins and therefore from the penalty of hell as well as the power of sin. He has provided that way through His Son Jesus Christ at the cross whereby we can be redeemed.

So what will be the believer's final state? He identifies it as a new heavens and a new earth which is the other destination. People always ask me ‘Pastor, when I die will I go to heaven?’ We have already covered that in a previous study but when you die you go to an intermediate state, not a final state. When we are born into this world our first state is we are dead in our sins. Then when God's grace brings us from death unto life and raises us from the tomb of sin to the triumph of Christ then we have entered into a redeemed state. In that redeemed state we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ with Christ in us as we are on our way to be with Christ for all of eternity. So when we die we are in the redeemed intermediate state with the Lord in His presence in a spiritual existence yet our body is ashes to ashes and dust to dust. But God is not through with us yet.

In the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed we are reminded that we believe in the resurrection of the body. When God made man He made him physical and spiritual as two threads woven into one cloth. Redemption is we are born again spiritually and we will be resurrected and transformed physically. The Word of God is consistent with that in the Old and New Testament. I want to give you a few texts on this just so we're on the same page in this

intermediate state that we go to be with the Lord when we die and remind us of what we have already covered in a previous study. Let's start by looking at II Corinthians 12.

II Corinthians 12:1–4 says [1] *I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.* [2] *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.* [3] *And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—* [4] *and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.*

This is third person reference to himself where Paul has had this movement of the Lord, this transportation of giving him a consciousness and catching him up to what he calls the third heavens. The Bible is pretty consistent about this third heaven. The Bible says that God created the heavens, plural, and the earth, singular. So what does it mean about the heavens? There is a lot of discussion about that. In the world and life view of the cosmology and the Hebrew mind they are saying that what is above you (around you) is the first heavens. The angelic dwelling place is the second heavens and then the place where God dwells is the third heavens, which is also called paradise. So when Jesus comes into this world, goes to the cross, rises again and ascends back up into heaven He goes to the third heaven and in the II Corinthians text the third heavens is also called paradise.

The third heaven has a number of names in the Bible. It is known as paradise, Abraham's bosom, the Father's House as well as the third heaven. That is the reference to the dwelling place of God. Absent from the body and present with the Lord and the Lord is in the third heaven which is paradise. There is an intermediate state of punishment called Hades which is not the final state of Gehenna and there is the intermediate state of blessing and perfect blessing as we go into His presence there in the third heaven or in paradise or Abraham's bosom or My Father's House where He prepares a place for you. So that where I am there you may be with Me also (John 14:3). Jesus also says to the thief on the cross 'Today you will be with Me in paradise' (or the third heaven). We see in Luke 16 about the rich man and Lazarus with the third heaven being referred to as Abraham's bosom. So we have talked about the intermediate state but this is not the final state.

The final state awaits the transformation of the body. Again, the Bible is consistently pointing that out in the Old and New Testament. Job speaks of it in anticipation of the resurrection and Abraham speaks of the final state of our existence as well as he anticipates the resurrection. Abraham understood that if he was to sacrifice the promised seed, his son Isaac, to the Lord under the command of the Lord then the Lord would raise Isaac, therefore he says to those with him, before he and Isaac head up the mountain for the sacrifice, 'that I and the son will come back.' Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham said that because he believed in the resurrection.

I want to show you one from the Old Testament in Psalm 16. The ultimate singer of the Psalms is not the sons of Korah, Moses or David even but it is Jesus. Psalm 16:9–10 says [9] *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.* (Why will His flesh that is ashes to ashes and dust to dust yet be secure?) [10] *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.* This is ultimately fulfilled in Christ but it is also the promise of Christ to us for as He was raised so we shall be raised. Our body is secured through the glorious, redemptive work of Christ, His crucifixion and His resurrection. We also see this in the New Testament. Let's go back to II Corinthians.

II Corinthians 4:16–18 says [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, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

II Corinthians 5:1— says [1] *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

In other words, how do I know that my body is going to be raised when Jesus comes for the final state? I know it because I have Christ's resurrection as the pattern and as He was raised so I will be raised. I also know it because the Word of God promises it and the same Jesus who saved me has put the Holy Spirit within me as the down payment of the fullness of redemption which includes the resurrection of the body. So in the intermediate state that body is still in the ground but in the final state it is raised incorruptible as the sea, land and everything gives up its dead and the Lord brings those bodies back into existence now as a new body for a new heavens and a new earth.

What would that new heavens and new earth look like and what will be going on there? First, I think your dwelling place is the new heavens and the new earth. I know there are some who think when they die they will be sitting on a cloud and strumming a harp or something but that's not it. In Isaiah 66 there is a new heavens and a new earth where we will be worshipping, existing and living. I believe we will be working and playing. There are vivid pictures of the lion and the lamb living in perfect harmony with no curse of sin and no enmity yet there is this glorious life.

One might be wondering why I say I think we'll be working when we get to heaven and you need to know that work is not a curse. Work is before the curse. The problem with work is the curse but not work. The problem is the thorns, thistles, frustrations and the sweat of the brow that comes from it but work itself is a blessing. We will have Sabbath to Sabbath, rest to rest, work to work and new moon to new moon. In other words, there is an unending, eternal existence with a body that is fit for eternity whereby we will enjoy all of those blessings of God with no sin, no possibility to sin, no consequences of sin, and in that perfect relationship of being with the Lord. Where I am you will be with Me, and heaven has come down. Now the eternal city exists – the bride of Christ with the Groom for all eternity. There are some more things I'd like you to see about this from a couple of key Scriptures so let's go to Romans 8.

How do we get to that place and how does it come into existence? Romans 8 is the regal chapter about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:18 says [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.* What does Paul say that is part and parcel of living for Jesus in this present time? It is sufferings so anyone that tells you believers don't suffer then show them this passage. Then take them to Philippians 1:29 which says [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* Take them to Colossians 1:24–25 which says [24] *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, [25] of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.*

So in Romans 8:18 Paul affirms that on this side of eternity, in this broken world, in this body that there is suffering but it is not even worthy to be compared to that which is to be revealed to us. When I was growing up there was this fascination with prophecy and heaven so there was a reaction against it and then you heard this common statement, ‘well Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good.’ I would challenge that because I don’t think you can do any earthly good until you get heavenly minded. If you think this is your best life now you’re not going to live a life for Jesus now. My best life is always ahead of me. It is never here or behind me. I have a great life now because I have a new grace-given life now and I thank God for this life now but the best for me is coming. Right now I live in a broken world but there is coming another heavens and another earth. Right now I live in a broken body but there is coming another body that He has prepared for me. I anticipate that as an encouragement for what I need to do here until I serve Him therefore these sufferings are nothing to be compared to what is to be revealed. Let’s look further at what Paul says in Romans 8.

Romans 8:19–21 says [19] *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* [20] *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* [21] *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* So you currently live in a heavens and earth that is under the subject of the curse of God. The creation didn’t ask to be cursed. No, God cursed it because of the sin in the land that came up to Him as Adam and Eve sinned before Him, therefore the curse came upon not only them but all of creation. Yet when God brought the curse He also set in motion the very process of the creation anticipating its deliverance from the curse. The curse He brought not only showed in a temporal way a warning for His judgment for eternity but it also put in motion the creation as it groans to be delivered.

When we had our first child I had enough sense to do it the way God intended which was to give my wife to the doctors and I went to the waiting room. For the second child I was cajoled into hanging around but I wasn’t licensed by Lamaze so I couldn’t stay to the end for I was kicked out right before the birth. For my third child I was there through the whole thing and that was an interesting experience. I didn’t feel I had any business of doing it because of the process of childbirth and the groaning that takes place in that process that absolutely ate away at my soul as I vicariously wanted to take that away. So being the man I am I would rather just not be in there so I could practice some good ole denial as if there is nothing going on in there.

We are in this creation and when God brought a curse also brought the futility in such a way to bring an anticipation of the creation to be delivered. Do you see the birth language in this text? It is groaning. That is why when Jesus talks of His second coming, the sign of His second coming is the Gospel preached throughout all the world and all the elect bring saved but the birth pangs that there is a second coming and second deliverance is the creation groaning of famines, earthquakes and all these catastrophic events. You also see the groaning through humanity as we see wars and rumors of wars and all the oppression around us. These are not only the evidences of the curse of sin but they are also a timeclock ticking toward deliverance. Let’s continue.

Romans 8:22–25 says [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* [23] *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* [24] *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* [25] *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* So the Spirit helps our weaknesses. Here is this anticipation in the old heavens

and the old earth in these cursed bodies for a deliverance into a new body in a new heavens and a new earth by the coming of Christ in His work of consummation. Now let's look at II Peter 3.

In II Peter 3 we again see these themes coinciding. II Peter 3:1–9 says [1] *This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, [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." [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] 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.*

So here people are asking Paul what he means He is coming to bring things to consummation because everything is going like it always has been. Even though there are number of ways Paul can show them this he picks out one for them and that's the flood during Noah's time where water was used to judge the earth and all of humanity. Yet God provided a redemption that pointed to the Redeemer and that was the ark where God brought Noah, who found favor by the grace of God, and his household in that ark. Then the ark was shut up by God Himself for God secured them in the ark. Then came the judgment and everything perished and no everything has not been as it always had been. There is the absolute destruction from a Biblical world and life view to the notion of uniformitarianism. God intervened at that moment and then secured the redemption of His people as the judgment fell upon all, they were born to safety in the ark. Then as God brought them out they were now deposited in a renovated heavens and earth. Then He said 'I'll never judge this world again by water but one day by fire.' What will that lead us to? Let's continue in the text.

II Peter 3:8–10 says [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.*

Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? It is because not all of the 'all' in this passage have come to repentance. Who are the 'all'? He told us who the 'all' were in verse 8 and that is the beloved. So God will not send His Son until all of the beloved have been brought to repentance. God is also not governed by time for a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is not a formula but that just tells us He is not in the box of time for He made the box of time. He is the beginning and the end. His timing is perfect. We also know by Peter's first letter (I Peter) that the beloved are the elect of God. Jesus says 'I lose not one but raise them up on the last day' so until all those who have been brought by the Spirit through faith and repentance to Him will He come back. We also see that to the world the Lord's coming will be like a thief but not to the believer. So when He returns a rolling up and an exposing of sin will be uncovered.

II Peter 3:11–13 says [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.

What does it mean to hasten the coming of the Lord? When is the Lord coming? It is based on two things – the Gospel to all the nations and all the elect have been brought to Himself in faith and repentance. So for us to hasten the coming of the Lord is to get the Gospel to all the nations and one way that is done is through personal evangelism. Someday someone is going to lead someone to Jesus and that will be the last one and then the trumpet. We hasten the coming of the Lord through evangelism and missions. So in the meantime we are to be people that are intentional to pursue godliness and holiness. It is not legalism for that is when you try to work your way to heaven. Intentionality is merely sobriety as you rest in the power of God yet you endeavor out of the power of God to serve that God intentionally. We are not waiting with passivity for the Day of the Lord but with anticipation for that new heavens and new earth in which no longer sin dwells that has been exposed but now righteousness dwells.

Now I'd like to look at Revelation 21. Before I read this I want to sum up some things in distillation for you. In the new heavens and new earth with a new body, what are some of the things we'll be seeing? We will be worshipping, working, resting and there will be no sin, no consequence of sin. Righteousness dwells there. Not only that, but most gloriously, the Lord is present. I will see Jesus there, whom I now see by faith but will see Him by sight. He will be with me and I will be with Him and with all of those who belong to the seed of Abraham, redeemed through the work of Jesus Christ, circumcised in the heart, given a new record and a new heart in and through Jesus Christ, not one of us will be missing. Christ will be the foundation, center piece and capstone of that new heavens and new earth. We shall behold Him and all of His glory. We praise God as the anticipation for that.

So what is taking place? Here is what we're being told. To enter into that new heavens and new earth there will be conflagration representing the searing judgment of God that dissolves the present earth and heavens. But the present earth and heavens like our dissolving bodies will be transformed into a new heavens and a new earth yet all sin, the possibility of sin and the consequence of sin have been removed. So there is a conflagration in order to have a renovation occur and now there is an emancipation, where we have been set free, delivered from sin and its power, into the freedom that we now groan for, hope for and anticipate.

Now let's look at Revelation 21 where John by the Spirit of God takes us there. Revelation 21:1– says [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.* (In Hebrew cosmology 'sea' represents sin and its consequences) [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. (It is because He made the 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.”

We see in Revelation giving the picture in consummation what Isaiah said in Isaiah 66 of the two states and the final state of the believer that God will usher us into a new heavens and a new earth. He will be with us. It's interesting to note that creation starts in a Garden and then man produces a city. The origin of city is not God but it's man's rebellion but God sends His grace to the city. It is so glorious that in eternity the city becomes His people, the bride, the new city of Jerusalem that will be on the new earth and new heavens where we will worship emancipated with full renovation – no sin, no power or presence of sin. There will be life of work, play, enjoyment and relationships all to the glory of God in not just the felt presence but the sight presence of our God through the glorified incarnate Christ whom we will look upon. He will be with us and we'll be with Him – the bride with the Groom. Remember those words of Jesus from the cross? “It is finished” (In the Greek it is “*tetelestai*”) and when He comes again, it is done! His redemption, His glorious work was finished in His first Advent. His second Advent, it is done for I am making all things new.

One of the great blessings in my life is when I get the opportunity to do a wedding. There are two moments I love during a wedding. One is when the door opens and I see the look on the groom's face when he sees his bride. The other part I like is at the end when I say ‘upon consummation of this union before God I pronounce you man and wife, you may kiss the bride.’ I have already instructed the couple at this time that this will be the last kiss of the courtship and not the first kiss of the honeymoon but I do love those moments.

There is coming a day when the Groom who left His Father, went to the cross to purchase His bride and ensures no divorce for nothing can separate (divorce) us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, will bring us to Himself. O that day when the voice of the archangel and the trumpet sounds and the door is swung open. He sees His bride clothed in the white garments of purity provided by His blood at the cross and His righteousness given to us. Then the Father (not some ole PCA preacher) says to His Son, ‘You may kiss the bride for all eternity.’ Come quickly Lord Jesus! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the studies we have had of that glorious expectation and anticipation of what we can and will enjoy in Your presence. Father, we thank You that Your presence is already with us by Your Holy Spirit. So Father as You indwell us when we meet corporately as You indwell us as we scatter by being in each of us personally, we pray You would continue to bear witness of Yourself to us and bear witness of Jesus through us. We will give You the praise as we live pursuing godliness in anticipation of our Savior coming again, coming soon for the time is near, in Jesus' Name, Amen.