Two weeks ago, we started a new teaching series on heaven. Unlike early Christians, Americans tend not to have a robust, exciting picture of heaven. We don’t dream about it, anticipate it or let it stimulate us. Our view of heaven doesn’t radically affect our everyday attitudes & actions. Now, I am not talking about “being so heavenly minded you are of no earthly good!” but simply letting the idea of heaven keep us from “being so earthly minded we are of no heavenly good.” Two weeks ago I mentioned that we often picture leaving this world, like being at a party, park or activity that we are having a great time at, when someone tells us we have to go home. As we head home we feel sad, lonely and sorry for ourselves. But the picture God wants us to have is that when we step into our house, there is a great party far greater than anything we have ever experienced. And then we find some of those people at the other party start showing up one by one.

To help us picture heaven as God would want us to, we focused on Jesus’ words that portrays heaven as our home. And we encouraged everyone to take the positive interactions and benefits of home now and use those as a spring board to dream about the heavenly home Jesus is preparing for each of His followers. We were also encouraged to take the problems we see at home – whether physical, relational or environmentally – and reaffirm that our home in heaven is not going to have those problems, injustice, mistreatment or conflict!. This week we want to look at a second picture God gives us of heaven so we can dream, anticipate, envision and get excited about what God is preparing for us – and preparing us for!

We are going to turn to four brief passages of the Bible starting with Isaiah 65. Just so you don’t get nervous, the first point takes far longer than the other 2 (combined?).

**PROPOSITION:** *When we think of eternity in heaven, God wants us to picture a new earth full of an abundance of the good things of this life and an absence of wrong, sinful & bad things.*

I. Earth’s Redemption – a promise of heaven

A. God’s promise

1. **Isaiah 65:17** (also read v 20)
   
   God promises He will surely make new heavens and a new earth. In addition let me read v 20 because we’ll refer to that in a moment. Notice what it says about death

2. **Isaiah 66:22**
   
   READ. God claims this new heaven and earth will endure – in fact if we humans live to have eternal life, the new earth will also go on forever.
3. II Peter 3:12b-13
READ. This is a promise that God will make a new heaven and a new earth.
Notice that for the third time these two things – heaven and earth are combined.
This is something that will actually happen in the future and is not just figurative

4. Revelation 21:1
READ Rev 21:1. Four times we have read that God said very plainly that there
would be BOTH a new heaven and a new earth in the future. Clearly God wants
us to see these as combined – it is not just heaven that is in the future for us, but
also a new earth. Do you think that way? See, God is not just going to make our
current living situation a little better. That is what happens when we are an
active part of a Bible-believing church. God is going to remake earth – it is
going to be a more awesome job than what happens on those “extreme make-
over” shows. If God’s plan was merely to take people to a purely spiritual place
– heaven as a dwelling place only for spirits – there would be no need for new
heavens AND a new Earth. Why re-fashion the Universe and the continents? In
fact, God could just destroy all of it and be done with it. When we think of our
future in heaven, we need to remember that it includes an “extreme-makeover”
of earth as well!

This vague idea of heaven as something we can’t understand – ambiguous, nebulous
and incorporeal – is really more like the picture of the afterlife that the religions of
Buddhism and Hinduism have. The picture of the future in the verses we just read
gives a very different picture. The God of the Bible doesn’t give up on the earth but
redeems it, just as God didn’t give up on humans, but redeems those who believe. As
the theologian Anthony Hoekema says, “to leave the new earth out of consideration
when we think of the final state of believers is greatly to impoverish biblical
teaching about the life to come.”

B. Sequential aspects of heaven

1. The intermediate state
   II Cor 5:6-8
   Let’s consider these 4 verses from another angle. We often talk about three
different aspects of our future after death. The first we call the “intermediate
state.” This is the time between our physical death and when we receive our
future glorified resurrected bodies. As we saw in II Cor 5 two Sundays ago –
when a true believer dies, their inner being goes directly into the presence of
God – to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. We will remain
in this intermediate state from the time we die until Jesus Christ returns for His
people – then we receive our new resurrection bodies.

2. The millennium kingdom
   Rev 20
   Having received our resurrection bodies, we will rule with Jesus on a
   RENEWED earth for 1,000 years. This is called the millennium. It is referred
to here in Rev 20. The millennium is where Jesus frees nature from its groaning & rules directly from Jerusalem. It is where redeemed Christian believers (with their resurrected bodies) are spread throughout the world to administrate – in all the positive aspects of that term. It is where we receive the 30, 60 even 100 times what we have sacrificed in this life for Jesus. We are physically part of a renewed earth for 1,000 years.

3. Future heaven

Following a series of events at the end of that 1,000 years which are mentioned at the end of Rev 20, God then goes beyond renewal to REMAKING heaven and earth – a NEW heaven and earth as we read in Rev 21:1. What about our 4 verses. The first promise of a new heaven and earth we saw in Isa 65 most likely refers to the millennial kingdom because deaths are referred to in Isa 65:20. But when we look at the new heaven and earth here in Rev 21:1, it most likely refers to a future eternal heaven and earth because 21:4 says there is no death. In other words, God wants us to think of both the millennium AND the eternal future as having a new earth as a part of them. So while some people say that there is nothing about our present experiences that can help us know what heaven is like, the Bible is encouraging us to picture a renewed – and also a new earth – where things go right. If you want to know what heaven will be like, look at what is good, desirable and special about this earth – then magnify it by a billion. The same God who designed the first one is renewing and remaking these new ones. God puts the new heaven and new earth together on purpose so we will put the two together. Is this seen anywhere else in the Bible? Absolutely!!! Turn to Matt 19 which I will get to in a moment.

C. Earth restored, redeemed, renewed, remade

In Acts 3:21, Peter preached “Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as He promised long ago.” Peter didn’t say God was going to restore “every one” but “everything”. It is not just humans who believe in Jesus and obey him who will be restored, redeemed, renewed and remade – but also some “things”. The earth is going to be restored, redeemed, renewed and remade. Where did Peter get that idea? From Jesus and how He applied the Old Testament promises! Notice how Jesus answered Peter’s question. READ Matt 19:27-29. Again notice that the renewal is not of “everyone” who believes, but it is the renewal of EVERYTHING. Simply put, God has never given up on His original creation. He is going to bring earth back to its original intent so His plan will be fulfilled.

1. Earth’s creation was good

Gen 1:31

God saw all that He had made and it was very good.” If it was that good, why does He get rid of it forever? Consider the garden of Eden that was part of God’s great creation. It was beautiful, peaceful and perfect. Personally, I believe there is something in us that is homesick for the perfection of Eden. TURN BACK TO REV 21 (which we’ll get to in a moment!)
2. Sin’s curse defaced

When Adam and Eve sinned, it not only corrupted and deformed human nature but it also put a curse on this world. Everything doesn’t go smoothly. Nature becomes the survival of the fittest. Natural disasters like earthquakes, storms and hurricanes reap destruction. Everything dies and decays. As Romans 8:20-21 says “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself (that’s the earth and nature) will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Our heart rejoices when we hear those prophecies that a time is coming when the weapons of war will all be made into farming implements for good. We get excited about the day when the lion will lay down with the lamb and a little child doesn’t need to fear getting bitten by a snake. Sin’s curse has defaced nature, but God hasn’t given up on the earth – He is going to renew and then remake the earth again. That is what Rev 21:1 & those other verses are telling us.

3. Uniting heaven and earth

But God’s plan goes farther than that. Ephesians 1:9-10 says, “God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” One of God’s glorious goals is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under Jesus. This is bigger than we can imagine. I believe this is saying that the separate realms of heaven and earth will be merged or united together under the Lordship of Jesus – that the new heaven and earth will be united in a new universe which we will live in forever. Heaven is God’s home. Earth is our current home. Jesus Christ – God come down in human form – forever links God and humanity. Earth isn’t abolished forever but it is to be remade. In fact, look down at Rev 21:3. READ.

God will live with us and we will live with God. He is bringing everything in heaven and earth together. There will be no more divisions between the spiritual and the physical worlds. There will be no divided loyalties. Earth won’t be under the rule of “the prince of this world” anymore but under our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the unstoppable plan of God. This is where history is going. None of us have never seen earth as God originally made it. Our planet now is but a shadow-land of the original. But we can start dreaming about this future in heaven AND EARTH because we have something to work with. If this world is at times beautiful and wonderful even though corrupted by the fall & curse – imagine what our future is going to be like when sin, the curse and evil are totally gone! It will be beyond absolutely amazing! If the shadow can be so special at times, imagine what the real thing will be like!

II. The New Earth (what we are to picture)

Let’s briefly try – what other glimpses do we get of this new eternal earth in Revelation 21?
A. God direct presence there

First, we see God’s direct presence there. READ Rev 21:3. There will be no barriers of time, space, sin, or even heaven to stand between us and God. We’ll experience His direct presence there in the New Earth & New Heaven. More on this next Sunday.

B. The “pain” of this life is gone

Second we see that all the “pain” of this life will be gone. READ Rev 21:4. Every pain you and I go through reminds us this world is not our home and a better one awaits us as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the way, the statement that “there was no longer any sea” at the end of v 1 does not mean there won’t be any large bodies of water, colorful fishes, sandy beaches or body surfing. “No longer having any sea” would have excited the people of the first century because that meant there was no more separation of people from their loved ones, no more water which poisons you when you drink it or destroys the fertility of soil when you use it on fields. It means not having to cross vast areas with no way to know where you are without sun or stars. It means no more storms that destroy ships and destroy towns when they come ashore. God is not saying this negatively, to take people’s enjoyment away, but positively to show how God will take away their deepest fears!

C. Specific requirements to be a part of it

There are clearly some requirements to get into this new paradise. READ v 6. Clearly here, this gift of eternal life is a free gift – it is not something that we earn. But we won’t receive it if we don’t recognize our thirst and come to Jesus Christ to satisfy that thirst. In this lifetime, every one of us should feel some longings – it is normal to feel like something is missing in our lives. That is this thirst – a thirst that will never be totally satisfied in this life. So how do we try to satisfy our loneliness, confusion, guilt, frustration and discouragement? Do we go to Jesus, do we seek to follow Jesus, do we picture situations as Jesus would have us? Or do insist others do things for us, try to stop that thirst by activities, buying things, drugs or leisure? They can’t quench the thirst, but neither will the thirst be gone until we are in the new heaven and earth.

READ v 27. Speaking of the new earth, if nothing impure can enter it, how will we be there since every one of us sins and sin makes us all impure? That is why Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead is so central for seeing life as it actually is. We can’t get to heaven as we are now. We need to be forgiven and cleansed. But that isn’t all – we can’t enjoy heaven unless there is genuine change in our life which God does by giving us a new nature, putting the Holy Spirit in us to learn to live and think differently and putting Jesus’ righteousness on us.

READ v 7. Once we start the genuine Christian life, God calls us to persevere – to keep going until the end, overcoming challenges and obstacles that want to get us to
compromise or quit the Christian life. Jesus said, it is he or she who preservers to the end who will be saved. And finally, we are to turn away from serious sin in our lives. READ v 8. It is not OK to pray to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior and then go out and do these things. We must repent and come back to the lifestyle Jesus calls us to.

D. Described as “city” & “country” Rev 21:10
Another way God wants us to think about the New Heaven and New Earth is as “a city” and as “country” or rural/natural areas. READ v 10. John is brought to a very high mountain – like a rural, sparsely inhabited mountainside to view the Holy City coming down to its place in the New Earth. So there is both country-side and city. Throughout history, one group gets excited about the city and fears the wilderness – while another group loves the forests but fears the city. What moves you the most – natural beauty or special design? Vermonters usually don’t get excited about a city because of the problems, they would rather think of the Garden of Eden part but their kids long to move to the city because of all the activity and things to do, JR Tolkien captures this in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Elves see beauty in the woods and waters; they are uncomfortable with caves and elaborate buildings. Dwarves are miners and build incredible buildings; they are uncomfortable deep in the forest. Legolas the Elf and Gimli the Dwarf become close friends and come to appreciate the beauty of the other person’s world. Legolas marveled at the ingenuity and architectural beauty of what the Dwarfs’ built at Moria. Gimli comes to appreciate the spectacular natural beauties of Lothlorien. In Rev 21-22, rivers, trees, fruits and mountains reflect the elements of Eden in the New Earth – a natural paradise that Middle Earth’s Elves would love. It also details the vast city, gates, walls, precious stones and detailed architecture that reflect Middle Earth’s dwarfs view of beauty. Which kind of beauty is better? In the New Earth/paradise we won’t have to decide, because both are there.

E. Unexcelled beauty, security, openness, wealth, righteousness Rev 21:11-21, 25
F. Nations, leaders, movement, commerce, production Rev 21:24-26
The majority of the details in Rev 21 deals with things we know today but which have fulfillment far beyond what we can imagine. Unexcelled beauty, perfect security, complete openness, untold wealth for all and righteousness – there are nations, leaders, travel, commerce and production all being mentioned. You may ask, “Neal why shouldn’t we take all this symbolically – there really isn’t a future city or walls or light or a mountain to stand on but these stand for things like security, warmth and closeness.” A quick comment – for those who are married, should you consider that wedding ring on your finger symbolically or literally? The answer is BOTH. It is an actual ring and it is symbolic for our commitment and love toward our spouse. If God talked about a new earth in both symbolic and non-symbolic parts of scripture then there must be something “earth-like” about what is coming. Of course, we won’t picture perfectly what is coming – but these are the pictures Jesus reveals to us so we can get excited the right way.
CS Lewis captured what I am trying to say in his book, *The Last Battle*. At one point Lucy is really down because the great world of Narnia, which Aslan created, has been destroyed. Even though Lucy, her friends and family are on the threshold of Aslan’s land (ie heaven), she still looks back at Narnia and feels a crushing loss. But as she moves deeper into Aslan’s land something happens which reflects this Biblical revelation of the New Earth.

"Those hills," said Lucy, "the nice woody ones and the blue ones behind – aren’t they very like the southern border of Narnia?"

"Like!" cried Edmund after a moment’s silence. "Why they are exactly like. Look, there’s Mount Pire with his forked head and there’s the pass into Archenland and everything!"

"And yet they’re not like," said Lucy. "They’re different. They have more colors on them and they look further away than I remember and they’re more ... more... oh I don’t know"

"More like the real thing," said Lord Digory softly

Suddenly Farsight the Eagle cried "Kings and Queens, we’ve all been blind. We are only beginning to see where we are. From up there I have seen it all – Narnia is not dead. This is Narnia."

"But how can that be?" said Peter. "For Aslan told us older ones that we should never return to Narnia and here we are." Others said, we saw it all destroyed and the sun put out. And it is all so different.

"The Eagle is right," said Lord Digory. "Listen Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that is not the real Narnia. It is only a copy or a shadow of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered has been drawn into the real Narnia... Of course it is different; as different as the real thing is from the shadow or as waking life is from a dream."

It was the unicorn who summed up what everyone was thinking. "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it until now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this." The reason we rightly love certain things on this earth is because they look just a little like the wonder we will be in forever in the New Heaven and New Earth. That’s home, that’s where we belong. That’s what we need to look forward to! To God be the Glory! Amen!