

**Eternity in Biblical Perspective:
Heaven & Hell –
The Final State—The Believer's Forever Home**

Hebrews 9:27-28

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November 21, 2010 – Evening Sermon

We are going to look at a couple of passages tonight and I'll need to do this somewhat focused and rapidly so we can allow for our time of thanksgiving to give praise to the Lord as we enter into this Thanksgiving Holiday. This is a great holiday. It was birthed by Christians in this country and therefore it is something that is very special to me. This is possibly my most favorite holiday of the year so we want to initiate it with some time of thanksgiving. Have your Bibles ready. I want to use several passages of Scriptures around five observations concerning the eternal resting place that belongs to all believers.

I want to ask you a question. Sometimes we will ask people "Where are you going?" Some will answer "I'm going to heaven." Heaven is a place we are going to and yet Jesus says in the beatitudes "The meek shall (in the future) inherit the earth." So am I going to heaven or am I going to inherit the earth? Which one am I going to have or could the answer be yes? I am headed to heaven and I am going to inherit the earth.

Please remember what we have said in this study. We have said that sin has brought death as God divinely designed consequence – physical death, spiritual death and eternal death. Jesus has come and won the victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave so in Him we can have life. When you come to Christ we have life. When a believer dies they go to an intermediate state. The intermediate state for an unbeliever is a place of torment called Hades and the intermediate state for the believer is a place of joy, a place of heaven also called paradise in the Scripture. Christ shall come again and then there will be a resurrection of the body for all. We will stand before the Lord. The Lord separates the sheep and the goats. At that time is the Judgment and the believers will see the glory of amazing grace in their salvation as their names are written in the Book of Life and they will be brought into eternal joy to be with the Lord forever and ever and ever to praise His holy Name. Also in the context of that are those dynamics of the rewards of heaven that are given to believers as well. Then over here you have the Judgment of those who don't know Him cast into a place and a

condition called hell, the lake of fire in which is everlasting isolation and torment away from the presence of God and under the judgment of God for all eternity.

Now what about the matter of our final state? Is my final state heaven? Yes. Is it the earth? Yes. The final state in the Bible is called the new heavens and the new earth. This present heavens and earth is going to be rolled up like a scroll and burned with fervent heat. Then the Lord rolls out a new heavens and a new earth. What will that be like? What does the Bible tell us about that and is that in fact factual? So let's work our way through a couple of passages of Scripture. Let's first look at Romans 8.

The first observation is the final state of the believer is a place and a condition called the new heavens and the new earth. Here is a marvelous text on this in Romans 8:18-25 which 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. 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. 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.

We live in a world that is groaning. You can see it in the shifting of the plates of the earth, in its earth quakes and in what Jesus calls the birth pangs of His coming. The birth pangs are constantly telling us that God has yet to deliver this creation. By the way, not only is the creation groaning but we are groaning. It's interesting to hear people as they are approaching the end of their life say "I can't wait until next summer" and you know you don't really have too many summers left. Why would people say that?

I was given a challenge one time in a book that I read about a good way to share the Gospel is just to ask people if they think there is a heaven. I have done that. My favorite way is to get on an airplane and before I get on the airplane I'll pray for a little turbulence. I'll just pray that God will send enough to shake the compartments and maybe open a door or two in the plane with nothing falling out to hit anybody but just to shake it up a little bit. Then after that comes I turn to the person next to me and say "Do you think there's a heaven?" I have literally talked with people who are atheist that I find out later in our conversation but their first answer to that question is "Oh yeah." "I think there's a heaven." "Really you think

there is a heaven?" "Yeah." My next question is "How do you think you get there?" Then of course that opens up all kinds of conversation.

Why is it that nobody ever initially tells me "no, I don't think there's a heaven"? Later on, after they unfold their philosophical views and maybe their atheistic concepts they'll say "We're just worm food and that's it" but not initially. The reason I have never heard that is because the Bible says in the book of Ecclesiastes that God has set eternity in the heart of a man. We know we were designed for forever. We are fully aware of this and all this death, sickness and curse of sin around us we know is not natural. That is a curse of sin and we like the creation groan to be delivered from it. We groan for it. The only way you can be delivered is in and through Jesus Christ and the only way this creation is going to be delivered is when Christ comes again but now it is groaning.

Contrary to books you buy that tell you your best life is now or you can have it all now or all of that is not it. Believers never live for now, they live now for Christ to be with Him then forever. Our best days are always ahead of us if we're a believer. They are never behind us. We are moving to something. We're being delivered from something to something. What is that something we are being delivered to? Peter builds on this a little bit in 1 Peter. Peter answer a lot of questions that people are asking about the matters of eternity and what the Lord is doing. He tells us not to be surprised.

I want to read something to you. I have been doing some work again on the life of John Calvin and I'm supposed to get a book written on this in the next couple of months. As I was going back over it I was reading some things out of John Calvin's letter writing ministry that he had. There was this marvelous lady named Madame, de Coligny who was a French Huguenot whose husband was a very important leader of the Reformation in France. Both of them had been afflicted greatly and in various ways had been tortured and also had physical sickness. Calvin wrote her a letter one time and this is what he said in relationship to her afflictions:

They (that is referring to our physical afflictions and diseases) should moreover serve as medicine from God that continually purge us from worldly affections to keep us from trenching in and retrenching us for heaven. For this that is here is superfluous and our afflictions are reminding us of its superficiality and since they now like the Apostle Paul are thorns in the flesh, messengers reminding us of death, so that we ought always to live with one foot raised ready to step into glory to be with our God.

Isn't that a great praise? "Living with one foot raised, ready to step into the presence of the Lord..." He said that these afflictions are constantly reminding us that its not here and it's not for this that we live but it is that which we are moving toward.

Now I want to look at 1 Peter 4:12-14, 19 which says

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

All of that he had set up that we endure these sufferings looking to glory by these statements.

Let's look back at 1 Peter 4:7-11 which says

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (We are to always be ready to do what?) 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Here are these glorious calls for us to live with sacrifice, loving and graciousness, always looking to the end of all things that is at hand. He would then write to these same people under persecution, something even more pointed. Now turn to 2 Peter 3:8-13 which 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. [All of those for Christ, in Christ, in the beloved and have been given to Christ by God. He will not come until He has brought all of you to glory. Now what does He say?] 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. 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 (not sin and its curse but where) righteousness dwells.

That's what we wait for. Now what will that look like? It's an actual place, a new heavens and a new earth and its there that we shall be and all of those in the Book of Life shall dwell with the Lord forever. So what does it look like? After all of those who are thrown in the lake of fire, death and Hades, what about those written in the Book of Life? Let's look at Revelation 21:1-4 which 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. (What's in this new heavens and new earth? It's a river. River means blessing and sea represents chaos of sin and there is no sea in this heavens and new earth in the sense of the roaring foam that would over take us and the consequences of sin. On the contrary there is a river of life that brings life wherever it flows.) 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. (You are that new Jerusalem that is being prepared. The church of Jesus Christ, the saved, the elect of God are being prepared and God will dwell in the midst of them as they are brought here into the presence of this new earth in this new heavens.) 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 (the things belonging to sin and its curse) have passed away."

He goes onto say (Revelation 21:5-8)

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

He goes onto speak of this place again. Revelation 21:9-14 says

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.

In other words here is this beautiful dwelling place of God. What is it? It is His people. They are the new Jerusalem. God will be in the midst of her. God will dwell in her midst that is His church. These people who have been caught up in the second coming, those who are already with Christ now are fashioned together into the dwelling place of God and they are brought to this new earth in this new heavens.

Now let's look at Revelation 21:22-27, 22:1-5 which says

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. 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.

So here is this glorious place and condition that we will dwell in with the Lord.

This brings me to the second observation which is this place and this condition is a place of relationship with Christ who is our King and who is our servant. He is our King and we will worship Him. We shall see Him and we shall glory in Him. We shall give Him praise as our King and He will serve us. Let's look at Luke 12. Here is a parable designed to tell us to be ready. Luke 12:35-37 says 35 "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 36 and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he

will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.

Is that not just overwhelmingly humbling that the King comes and we meet Him and worship Him. He takes aside His cloak and then prepares Himself to serve us. In other words, when He comes He just picks up right where He left off when He left us. Today we just had the Lord's Supper. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, what's the last thing He did? He took a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. He told them, "If I don't serve you, you have no part in Me." Now when He comes again what will He do? He will be King and we will glory in Him and He will serve us. Our great humility strikes out at that moment when we say "Oh no, you mean Jesus serving me for all eternity, are you sure?" What do you think He is doing right now? How do you think you got saved? How do you think we stay saved? He is serving you because He loves you. That's the One that we will be with forever. It is our King who serves His people in the new heavens and the new earth.

The third observation is it's a place and condition of loving relationships in the Lord. Let's look in John 14. It's a relationship with the Lord and with each other. Here, before Jesus leaves after washing their feet and serving them He says in John 14:1-6,

1 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. (it's a place and a condition) If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 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. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is telling us this is a place that is prepared intimately for you and spaciouly as a declaration of the Father. It is a place and a condition of everlasting relationship with Me and for you or may I translate 'for ya'll', for 'all ya'll' who are in Christ.

There is this place and condition in which we have a relationship with Him but also we have relationships with each other. This is part of the comforting. Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 4. Because others had already died and gone on they were asking the Apostle Paul since Jesus hadn't come back yet, where are those? He is telling them if they are absent from the body then they are present with the Lord but Paul gives us a little bit more insight here. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

So will I recognize my loved ones who are saved? Absolutely. We have already talked about that transformed body. That transformed body is totally different in eternity with no curse of sin upon it but clearly when we saw the glorified body of Jesus it was different. He opened a door but He didn't have to. He prepared a meal He would eat. He would do all of those things and then of course we see Moses and Elijah transformed yet they are Moses and Elijah. So God has this specially prepared body for you. So covenant children dying under the atoning work of Christ are not children forever. Old people are not old people forever with the marks of sin upon their emaciated bodies. God has this special body yet we're recognizable and we'll know one another. We can comfort one another now because we will be with Him and together there. There will be an unbroken relationship of love that we enjoy with each other.

The fourth observation is it is a place and condition of sinless perfection. We will be there and there will be no sin. There will be no consequences of sin, no sickness, no death and not only will we not sin but we will be like Him which means we will not be able to sin. We won't have to flee temptation. We can dismiss our accountability group. We can just get together, worship and praise the Lord because there will be no sin, no ability to sin and we can enjoy the presence of the Lord together.

There will be rewards in heaven. Jesus is very clear that rewards while it is not the primary motivation of my Christian life, it is a secondary motivation for with those rewards I will use those rewards to praise Him. How can there be rewards? Aren't we saved by grace? Absolutely. Here's the best illustration I know to give you about rewards. When you go to a restaurant and people wait on you and then you're supposed to do what? You are supposed to give them a tip. I hate restaurants where they say the gratuity is added. To me that is not a gratuity that's a tax but when I get the opportunity to actually give a tip, I do a tip. What am I doing? I'm giving this person money for waiting on me but if I hadn't come in and bought the meal they wouldn't have had a job. Now I'm giving them a tip for doing the job that I gave them when I bought the meal. That's the best illustration I can give you for rewards in heaven. The only reason I'm in

heaven is because Jesus has already purchased it for me and bringing me to glory but Jesus is going to affirm your faithfulness to Him in that day. Those are the rewards.

I have had people say to me “Yeah, but is that fair?” No, but it is called grace. That is God affirming the work of grace in our lives. One might say “Then there is going to be some haves and have nots.” Deep down inside we all think heaven is socialism, don’t we? We think heaven is like the end of a sports league where everybody is supposed to get a trophy, right? No, we all get the crown. We all go to be with the Lord and then the Lord affirms what you have done with those talents. Then you take that and say “But it was of You, from You, and unto You” and you give it back to Him in praise and glory as He affirms what you have done and He delights in affirming what you have done.

Here’s the kicker. Because there is no sin there will be no jealousy. There is no envy. Do you know what is going to happen when you see Isaiah honored, when you see Paul honored, when you see your spiritual mentor that sacrificially gave much so you would grow honored? You won’t have jealousy and envy, you’ll praise God. You’ll be a cheerleader saying “God, give him another one!” because envy and jealousy will not be found there. We will rejoice in the Lord and what the Lord has done in the lives of others. That will be a day of great glory to Him.

Fifthly, it’s a place and condition of eternal glory to be with the Lord forever. So you are going to heaven and you’ll end up in the new earth forever and ever with the Lord. What did God do in Genesis 1? God created a heavens and earth and He formed it. On the sixth day He filled it. What is Jesus doing now? He is filling a new heavens and a new earth and on that Day when He comes He’ll form it and fill it with you and Him forever. Will you be there with Him forever? Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Thank You for the Lord Jesus and the privilege to know Him, love Him, and be with Him for all eternity. Thank You Father for the grace and mercy that is found in Jesus Christ. I thank You for the anticipation of serving You here, even in the midst of afflictions, disappointments, where we falter, fall short and deal with the consequences of sin, yet we have a blessed Hope, and we look forward to the great and glorious Day of our Savior coming, a new heavens, a new earth, where we will be with Him. He has gone to prepare a place for us so that where He is there we may be with Him together. Praise His Name, Amen.

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