

13: Glorification, heaven and the new creation**Introduction**

Our subject this morning is the End. The technical word to describe final things is eschatology – the return of Christ, the last judgement, heaven and hell. We're not going to think about judgement or hell today. But we are going to think about the fullness of the salvation which Jesus will give his people one day.

As we begin let's pray together. Then we'll read through three chapters of the Bible - Revelation 20-22.

Some Christian people get really confused about eschatology. There are lots of different views about end-times in the wider church. It's hard to work out what to make of some of them. For example, does the Bible teach a theology of the end that is premillennialist, amillennialist or postmillennialist? What is the rapture?

We're not going to go into those differences this morning. It's not surprising some of us are a bit confused. There's a lot of confusion out there! And, sadly, there's also a lot of weirdness out there too.

But most Christian people just don't think much about heaven. Why? Edward Donnelly, in his brilliant little book called *Heaven and hell* suggests these reasons:

- (i) We're too preoccupied with the present world
- (ii) In the western world we're too comfortable. Only tragedy stabs us awake and makes us aware of heaven and hell
- (iii) We think of it simply as the inevitable next stage in our existence (not just unbelievers, but Christians too). Why waste time wondering about it?
- (iv) It doesn't appeal to us. Why attend a church service that goes on forever.
- (v) Sometimes Christians are brainwashed into neglecting it. We want to please and appeal to outsiders – who of course don't think heaven is relevant. We want to be useful on earth.
- (vi) It's a reality too awesome for our minds to grasp.

There are many reasons why we *should* think about heaven, the new creation and our final glorification. Not least, because it's encouraging (cf. 1 Thess. 4:18, "Therefore encourage each other with these words"). I've spoken this week with three Christians who find themselves pretty sad; life, circumstances, sin and their own temperaments have worn them down. What will encourage them? The good news of heaven is real! We need that encouragement.

Before we dive in let me recommend two good books. The first of these is a general book of the doctrine of salvation which I've mentioned several times before. The second is specifically on eschatology – and it's a beautiful, encouraging read.

- John Murray, *Redemption accomplished and applied*
- Edward Donnelly, *Heaven and hell*

1. What is heaven?

The term "heaven" is a massively misunderstood word. The Bible uses it in two ways:

(a) The skies

Here we're talking about the firmament or expanse above our heads – the atmosphere, what we might call "space". These are the skies. This is what we see created in Genesis chapter 1.

(b) God's place

God does not need a dwelling place, nor can he be confined to one. But this word is also used in the Bible to speak of the dwelling place of God.

It is God's home (Psalm 33:13-14, Matthew 6:9), where his throne is (Psalm 2:4, Rev 4-5), the place to which the glorified Christ has returned (Acts 1:11). It is identified with God's temple (Ps 11:4, etc). Heaven is the place from where God hears, blesses and reveals his wrath (2 Chron 7:14, Gen 19:24, Romans 1:18).

Here the real tabernacle/temple is to be found and this is where Christ enters to accomplish his redeeming work (Hebrews 8:5, 9:12-24).

Heaven can be thought of as the home of the angels, the spiritual realm and the spiritual powers (Job 1-2, Luke 2:12, 10:18, Matthew 18:10, Col 1:15-20, Eph 1:10, 6:12, Rev 12:7-13).

Probably the most important thing for us to note is this: the word translated "heaven" in our Bibles is not used for the future hope of the Christian. It is a present reality. It is where the souls of dead believers go to be with Christ until resurrection day. But it is not the future. We shall spend the eternity not in "heaven" but in the new heavens and new earth.

2. Heaven is all about the glory of Jesus

(a) Heaven is "glory"

Heaven is where God's magnificence is revealed. That's why Scripture sometimes describes heaven as "glory" (eg. Ps 73:24 and Heb 2:10). Heaven and glory are so identified with each other that the two terms are almost interchangeable. God's place is filled with the glory of God.

And the story of the Bible is of heaven – of glory – coming back to this world. When we die we pass into heaven, into glory. Then when Jesus comes again bodies raised, changed, transformed, glorious.

We're reminded of this: that heaven exists for God's own glory. It's not about me and about my pleasure. Heaven is all about God. We see that, in passing, in Luke 15:21 – "I have sinned against heaven...", says the guilty son. That shouldn't be a surprise – for everything is done for God's glory.

(b) Heaven is about Jesus

More specifically, heaven is about Jesus and the glory of Jesus.

- **Being with Jesus**

The Bible's favourite way of describing heaven is simple: it is being with Jesus.

- John 14:3, "... that where I am there you may be also."
- John 17:24, ""Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."
- Luke 23:43, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

The New Testament nowhere speaks of believers going "to heaven" – but of going to be "with Christ" (e.g. Phil. 1:23, 2 Cor. 4:14). For Paul, heaven means Jesus. Just as heaven is often synonymous with the glory of God, so too it is identified with the Son of God in whom his glory is revealed. A slightly simplistic equation would put it like this: "Heaven = glory = Jesus."

Why is being with Christ such a central component of heaven? Why can John say of the Holy City in Revelation 21:23 that "the Lamb is its light"?

- **We will forever praise Jesus who brings us to glory**

Richard Baxter wrote that “Heaven is the fruit of the blood of the Son of God; yea, the chief fruit.” He gets us to glory.

And the celebration of Jesus’ redeeming work is at the heart of glory. It is the “lamb” who we are told in Revelation will be praised for ever (e.g. Rev. 7:10).

- **Seeing Christ is the heart of heaven’s blessing**

The OT saints looked forward to seeing God. In the NT we’re promised that one day we will see Christ face to face. Listen to these verses:

Job 19:25, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;”

Isaiah 33:17, “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.”

1 Corinthians 13:12 “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

John 17:24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

1 John 3:2 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Revelation 22:4, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

On a wedding day, what thrills the bride most of all? Clothes, flowers, guests? No. The bridegroom’s joyful face and presence.

So too it will be with the Christian in glory: being with and seeing Christ is the heart of heaven’s blessing. This is no surprise. The whole of salvation is found “in Christ” – and our union with Christ will not be ended in glory.

In *Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan’s Mr Standfast rejoices just before his death and says: “I am going now to see that Head that was crowned with thorns and that face that was spat upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith, but now I go where I shall live by sight and shall be with him in whose company I delight myself.”

Here’s the Puritan minister Samuel Rutherford: “We want HIM! I should refuse heaven if Christ were not there. Take Christ away from heaven and it is but a poor, unheartsome, dark, waste dwelling. Heaven without Christ would look like the direful Land of Death... I want heaven in order to have Christ, not Christ in order to have heaven.” (*Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*).

As we fix our eyes on Christ we see the glory of God in Him. Christ is the light-bearer in the new creation. There’s no light (just as there is no temple). Christ is the light of the glory of God. (i.e. for eternity he will continue to reveal God to us).

But what else can we say about what God has got in store for the Christian person?

3. Our final glorification

(a) Our glorification occurs with the coming of Christ in glory

Titus 2:13, "while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

1 Peter 4:13, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

OUR glorification occurs WITH CHRIST – it's connected to his glory. That's one reason why we long for him to "come." His appearing and the revelation of his glory is crucial for us.

Or to put it another way: our glorification occurs at the end of the plan of redemption. Logically where we are at in our doctrine of salvation is this: glorification occurs...

- At the end of the application of redemption: what begins with effectual calling is completed here, with the final glorification of the Christian.
- At the end of the whole divine plan: what begins with predestination in eternity past is concluded here. This is what we are elected and saved for.

(b) Our glorification occurs with the resurrection of the body

Glorification is *not* the blessedness believers enter at death. Being dead is great for the Christian! It's to be present with the Lord, to be without sin, to be with Christ (2 Cor 5:8, Heb 12:23, Phil 1:23). The apostle Paul says it is better by far.

But redemption doesn't just deal with sin. It also must deal with sin's consequences. The chief consequence of sin is death. And physical bodily death has not yet been swallowed up. Final glorification only occurs with the resurrection of the body. So we read in Romans 8:23, "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Full salvation and full sonship comes with the redemption of our bodies. Or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15 we will one day be clothed with immortality. This is glorification. "Glorification has in view the destruction of death itself" (John Murray, *Redemption accomplished and applied*, p175.) Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 15:51-54, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory.""

(c) Glorification is connected to the renewal of creation

Romans 8:20-23, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Creation has been made subject to vanity – it has been twisted out of joint by God. It will one day be delivered into the glorious freedom of the children of God. The destiny of creation is connected with the destiny of the Christian. Specifically, it's when our full salvation comes – and our bodies are redeemed – the creation will be renewed and sorted out.

So, we will be glorified in the context of a renewed cosmos – the new heavens and new earth. The cosmos will be delivered from all the consequences of sin; there will be no more curse.

In passing notice this: a resurrection body and a renewed creation reminds us that matter is not the source of evil. Some have taught over the centuries that the body is bad, that creation is bad, and that salvation is liberation from physical things. This is heresy. God is the inventor of matter; he will redeem his creation as he will redeem our bodies.

(d) God will make us like his glorious Son

The point here is this: God wants to make his people LIKE JESUS – in order that Jesus gets loads of glory. So we read...

Philippians 3:21, "... who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Romans 8:29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

1 John 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

[See also 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 2 Peter 3:12, Revelation 21:27, Revelation 22:3-4]

God wants to make many, many, many people LIKE HIS SON. If we wanted to make other people like us we'd rightly be accused of megalomania! But if your Son is the most glorious being in the universe... if he's the most glorious man in the universe... then he will get much glory from being the head of a great brotherhood.

And so God plans to make his children like Christ – with bodies and souls like that of Jesus. That's indeed what he has to look forward to: Christlike bodies that are not subject to sickness, decay, ageing. And Christlike souls that are sinless, loving and obedient.

Our freedom from sin must be one of the most wonderful aspects of future glory. We HAVE BEEN saved from the penalty of sin. We ARE BEING saved from the power of sin. And one day we WILL BE saved from the very presence of sin in our lives. There are three "tenses" to God's salvation – past, present and future. In the future we can look forward to freedom from the very presence of sin in our lives. (See also Rev. 21:27).

Here's how Augustine put it: one day we will be "freed from a delight in sin and immoveably fixed in a delight in not sinning... There we shall rest and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end!" (*City of God, XXII.30*).

Conclusion

What are some of the applications or "uses" of the Bible's teaching about heaven, the new creation and the Christian's future glorification?

- We need to correct ourselves and others about what the new creation is really like. Most popular ideas about the new creation are grotesque (golfers playing golf, etc.).
- We need to warn unbelievers: many take it for granted that they're going to this future – and they're not. There's no evidence that they're joined to Christ.

- We need to woo unbelievers: heaven is a hugely powerful evangelistic weapon. God offers to sinful, miserable humans an eternity of unimaginable happiness. If the church simply says “Christ can give you peace of mind... make your marriage better, etc.” then we’ve gone wrong.
- But most of the teaching about heaven in Scripture is to pastor the people of God. We are encouraged to serve Christ, pursue holiness, sacrifice our worldly desires and interests because of promise of heaven. And in the face of death and mortality we are comforted.

A hymn:

When trials come no longer fear

For in the pain our God draws near
 To fire a faith worth more than gold
 And there His faithfulness is told
 And there His faithfulness is told

Within the night I know Your peace
 The breath of God brings strength to me
 And new each morning mercy flows
 As treasures of the darkness grow
 As treasures of the darkness grow

I turn to Wisdom not my own
 For every battle You have known
 My confidence will rest in You
 Your love endures Your ways are good
 Your love endures Your ways are good

When I am weary with the cost
 I see the triumph of the cross
 So in it’s shadow I shall run
 Till You complete the work begun
 Till You complete the work begun

One day all things will be made new
 I’ll see the hope You called me to
 And in your kingdom paved with gold
 I’ll praise your faithfulness of old
 I’ll praise your faithfulness of old

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Homework:

- Think over and pray about some of the Bible passages we’ve looked at today.
- Over the next two weeks we’re going to think about assurance. For next time please read 2 Peter 1:1-15.