

NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH ?

The apostle Peter spells out dramatic details of the final Day of the Lord in 2Peter 3:11-14. The reality is a dreadful prospect for the unbeliever, but for those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the passing away of the heavens and the coming of the new heavens and earth is a delightful promise. And it leads to diligence, with a deliberate manner of living which welcomes the coming of the Lord.

1- Believers delight in God's promises to make all things new. Verse 13 says "*according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*" Likewise, in Isaiah 65:17 God says "*for behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind; but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create, for behold I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness.*" Revelation 21:1 says "*then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold the dwelling place of God is with man; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more, neither grieving nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And He who was seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new.*" What a prospect!

2- Righteousness dwells in the new heavens and earth. MG Johnston observes, "righteousness will no longer be a temporary visitor to a creation violated by sin. The new heavens and earth will be the permanent abode of righteousness." Revelation 21 and 22 describe how nothing "*cowardly, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, liars, nothing unclean or false*" will be there, but "*only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life,*" those who did not reject God's grace but who received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This echoes 1Corinthians 6:9-11, "*the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God; such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*" Jesus saves from sin, and heaven will be the eternal abode of all who have been set free and cleansed by the blood of Christ.

3- The new heavens and earth is a glorified physical reality. Revelation 22:5 notes how there will be "*no need of light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light*" since the sun, moon, and stars will have dissolved away, no longer needed. But this is no ethereal spirit existence, it is "real" in accord with the physical resurrection of Christ and of His saved people. The new heavens and earth are the promised consummation of God's plan for His people. The last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22 describe the restoration of the ruined creation of the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1-2. This is the re-creation, the redemption, the new world that Jesus in Matthew 19:28 calls "*the regeneration*" and Acts 3:21 terms "*the time of restoration of all things.*" It is what Romans 8:19 foresees, as "*creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God*" and "*the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (sin) and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*" (resurrection). The Scriptures directly connect the resurrection of creation to the resurrection of Christ and His people. As Romans 10:9-10 says, "*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" To be a Christian is to believe in the resurrection. Note also that today, the spirits of believers who die are taken to heaven now, to await the bodily resurrection and the new heavens and earth in which our glorified bodies will be re-united to our spirits forever.

4- The glorified Christ dwells in the new heavens and earth with believers. The apostle Paul makes it clear in 1Corinthians 15:3-4, "*I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*" God had promised resurrection, and He delivers His promises. As verse 14 goes on to say "*if Christ has not been raised then your faith is in vain*" and verse 19 "*if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, then we are of all people most to be pitied.*" But this earthly life is only the prelude to eternal heavenly life, as verse 49 says "*just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven*" and verse 52 "*the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*" We shall be transformed to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, in a resurrected and glorified physical body fit for heaven. Even as the Bible shows Christ Himself now forever dwells in a resurrected body, so will all who have put their trust in Him for salvation.

5- Will you be there with God forever? Billy Graham said, "the most thrilling thing about heaven is that Jesus Christ will be there. I will see Him face to face. Jesus will meet us at the end of life's journey." Will you be with Him, forever, at the end of the world as we know it? The temporary shall cast off its shadows and our real lives will begin, when God re-creates the new heavens and earth in righteousness. And if the new heavens and earth are dreadful for the unsaved but delightful to the saved, how then should we live our lives in response to God's promise of His coming? We'll discuss this next time! □