

Life Everlasting

**A sermon preached by Calvin Warpula
at the West University Church of Christ, Houston, Texas
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For the past several weeks, I have been studying with you the greatest themes in the world—God the Father and Jesus, God the Son. We have discussed the nature of the triune God, the coming of God the Son in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, Why Did Jesus have to Die?, The Resurrection of Jesus, The Ascension of Jesus and What is He Doing Now?, What Will Jesus Do When He Returns, and the Resurrection of Our Bodies at the Last Day. Today we are discussing “Life Everlasting.”

Last week we found from the Bible, particularly Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. There Paul talks about the resurrection of the body. In verses 42-44, Paul writes, [read]. He goes further in v. 52 following, [read through v. 54].

Here we read about the nature of our resurrected bodies. It has numerical one to one identity with us—the same “we” that is buried is the same “we” that is resurrected. The body that is sown is the body that is raised. The same singular, identifiable “it” that is perishable, dishonorable, weak and natural is the body that is resurrected imperishable, honorable, glorious and spiritual. This body will be us. It will be identifiable, recognizable, and have form and structure. The resurrected body has continuity and transformation. Continuity with us now—it is the same us, the same person, the same you and the same me, but it is transformed, changed into a never-dying, glorious body.

But what will we do in this glorious, new body? Where will we be? Will we remember our past lives on earth? Will we know each other in the resurrected state? Will we know about our loved ones who are not there with us? If so, will that make us sad? Where will we be? What will we do? How old will we be? Will we grow and progress? Will there be time and a succession of events? Will we get bored and restless? Will we eat and drink? Will we have sex and marriage?

These are all good questions. None of them is irreverent or irrelevant. I want to address some of these concerns today. I do not claim to have all

the answers but I will do the best I can to give you the answers I have found in this book, the Bible, the word of God. However, there are some things God has not told us and about these things we can give our best suppositions but not final answers. Our answers today are incomplete, but someday we will fully experience what we can only talk about in veiled mysteries now. The apostle Paul tells us that “we now see in a mirror darkly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (I Cor. 13:12). On some questions we must remember what this book tells us in Deut. 29:29: “The secret things belong to God but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.”

Trying to describe the indescribable and imagine the unimaginable is a task too great for our finite minds and feeble words. Perhaps I could sum it up in this one sentence: Heaven is to earth what a butterfly is to a caterpillar and what an adult is to a fetus.

I am traveling, the Lord willing, to the bush of Africa today. Can you imagine that if I meet someone native there who has never seen a modern city or modern technology or any pictures of it and my trying to explain what life is like in Houston? We can only explain the unknown by describing it in reference to the known. We can only refer to our experience and say it is something like that. That’s exactly what occurs in the Bible, especially in the book of Revelation where the heavenly world is pictured in symbols in chapters 21 and 22.

So what is going to happen to us?

First, we are either going to die or we will be alive when Jesus returns. Either way we will not be forgotten or forsaken by the Lord. In I Thessalonians, chapter 4, Paul says that when Jesus returns he will bring with him all the spirits of the righteous dead and God will resurrect their bodies and the spirit and the new, glorious body will be reunited in the totality of our individuality and personality. In I Corinthians 15, Paul says the righteous living will be instantaneously changed into their new glorious bodies. We will then all together be forever with the Lord. At this same time the wicked dead will be resurrected and the wicked living will face God in judgment.

Second, everyone who has ever lived, including us, will then go before the judgment seat of Christ. The Bible tells us that God will mete out divine and holy justice on those who have died in their sins without God the Father or God the Son. Hear the word of God in 2 Thess. 1:7-9: [read]. At this time, God will give final evaluation of the lives of his saints and reward them according to their labors. Some saints will have built on wood or hay

and their works will be lost but they themselves will be saved (I Cor. 3:10-15). The parables of the talents in Matthew 25 and of the minas in Luke 19 speak of the various rewards God's servants will receive.

Third, the Lord will say to the wicked, "Depart from me, I never knew you" or "Depart from me, I know you not" (Matt. 7:23; 25:12). Jesus said these will go away into eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). This is the eternal hell (Gk. *gehenna*) that Jesus spoke about ten times.

Fourth, then the Lord will say to the righteous, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth" (Matt. 25:34) and "Well done, you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler of many things. Enter into the joys of your Lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23). Jesus said these will then go away into eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

So, what is this eternal life like? What will happen to us? What will we do?

First, heaven will be a God-centered life. This is the one over-riding and supreme feature of heaven: We will be with God forever. Everything else is secondary and peripheral. Heaven with its entire splendor without God would be hell. Heaven is heaven because the Lord is there. The Bible says that the righteous will see God "face to face" (Rev. 22:3-4; Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). "We will see him as he is" (I Jn. 3:2).

Of course, the Bible tells us that no one can see the majesty and deity of God in all its fullness (Exodus 33:20; I Tim. 6:16). We will not be gods nor will we be deified in any way. God alone is God. "To see God" means to dwell in his presence. "In thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psa. 16:11; see also Psa. 27:4; 73:25-26). "The crowning wonder of our experience in the heavenly realm will be the endless exploration of that unutterable beauty, majesty, love, holiness, power, joy and grace which is God himself" (Bruce Milne, The End of the World: What the Bible Says, 1979, p. 126).

The "one hope" (Eph. 4:4) of Christians in N.T. times was not the furniture, climate, landscape or environment of heaven. The ne hope was of the coming of Jesus Christ and of our being with him forever (Tit. 2:13). Believers were primarily looking for the coming of the Lord in glory. This hope was personal faith and confidence in Jesus Christ: "I will come again and take you unto myself that where I am there you may be also" (Jn. 14:3-4). The N.T. speaks very little about heaven. In fact, the N.T., outside the book of Revelation, has very little about heaven. It talks more about hell

than heaven. But the N.T. is filled with the hopes of Jesus' coming and our being together with him forever. This is our supreme eschatological expectation.

I am afraid that we sometimes get so interested in the furniture and conditions of heaven that we neglect and overlook our beautiful and blessed relationship with God. That would be like me getting so excited about my new house with its furnishings and opportunities and forgetting the love of my life, my wife, who lives in that house. I don't go home at night to relish and delight in my furniture but to love and cherish my beloved wife. Like our earthly homes, our heavenly home is made by who's there, not what's there. In fact, the *what* of our home is because of the *who* of our home. The same with heaven.

That is why in today's singing I asked Verne to lead the songs "Thou, My Everlasting Portion," "Is It for Me, Dear Savior?" and "Savior More Than Life to Me" because that is what eternal life is all about. Eternal life is a relationship with God (Jn. 17:3). I think that after ten-thousand years we may get bored with sightseeing golden streets and pearly gates if God were not there. However, God is never boring. There is no way we could ever get bored with knowing God and experiencing his presence. God is what makes heaven heaven. In heaven, we'll have perfect knowledge of God, perfect enjoyment of God and perfect service of God.

Second, heaven will be an embodied life and a social life.

I have spoken earlier today and last week about the new, embodied existence of numerical one-to-one continuity and future, qualitative transformation. All the images, symbols and pictures of heaven are of a new society enjoying God forever. The Bible pictures this new society as a perfect city (Rev. 21-22), as a victorious kingdom (Heb. 12:28), as a wedding feast (Matt. 8:11-12; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7). These are social pictures, not isolated individuals living in loneliness or separateness.

When God created us in the beginning he said that it was not good for man "to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). We are social creatures. Some of the greatest joys in life are those that we share with others. We don't like to eat alone, fish alone, bowl alone, golf alone, play games alone, or sit in a football stadium, a movie theater, or a church building alone. Heaven will be a dynamic social fellowship where we will enjoy perfect fellowship with God and all the saved forever.

We will know who we are. After death, we still have memory and consciousness (as in Lk. 16:19-31). "We" desire to depart and be with

Christ (2 Cor. 5:8). We are going to know who we are and who Christ is. Stephen saw into heaven and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). “We shall know even as we are fully known” (I Cor. 13:12). “We shall forever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:18). If we don’t know who we are, we would not know how we got there, we would not know our past, and we would not know anything about who God or Christ is. Otherwise, we would be in spiritual amnesia and Alzheimer’s which is not a happy condition. We will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11) and know Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:1-5). Likewise, we will know all the saints. Death does not rob us of our personalities or identities.

But, someone asks, “If we know each other in heaven, won’t we know those of our loved ones who are not there and won’t that make us sad?” Yes, we will know our pasts and we can remember those that were with us on earth, but no, that will not make us sad. Any tears that we have over the past will be wiped away by the Lord (Rev. 21:4). He is able to comfort us. Right now, you have peace, comfort, you are well-fed and well-housed, and yet you intellectually know that there are millions in our world homeless, hungry, and destitute. That intellectual knowledge does not keep you from enjoying the blessings God has given you now. Likewise in glory, we may intellectually know that some of our families are not there, but the joys of being with God will so fill our lives that we will rejoice in him. God knows who is lost and God knows who is saved. Now if God can be happy eternity knowing that some of his creation did is not there, then he can make us happy in eternity, too. And keep this in mind: if we don’t know anyone in heaven, then according to this logic, we would be unhappy forever because we will think that all our family and friends did not make it.

Third, heaven will be a responsible life. The Bible says that his “servants shall serve him there” (Rev. 22:3). How could we be called “servants” if we don’t have anything to do, or to serve in or with? We will worship God and this involves activity. But we will do more than just sing, although that will be part of our regular activity (Rev. 7:7-14). The servants who were faithful with the minas in Luke 19 were told, “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities” or “take charge of five cities” (Lk. 19:17-18). This indicates work, activity, oversight, and responsibility. The faithful servants in the talents parable are told, “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come enjoy your master’s happiness” (Matt. 25:21, 23). In the perfect Garden of Eden, man was to work and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15). Likewise, in that heavenly Garden of Eden, we will work and have

responsibilities. Productivity and accomplishment are part of “the master’s happiness” that we will enjoy forever. What all this will be and what this means we do not know.

Someone asks, “But how can we work if we are to rest? I thought heaven would be perfect rest.” It is. To “rest” in the bible does not mean to cease from activity but to live without stress, problems, or troubles. The reason we get inactive here and plop down into our easy chair or on our sofa is because of the weariness of our flesh, but in heaven there will be no frustration, no opposition, no conflict, no annoyances, no disappointments, no failures, and those are the things on earth that make work so debilitating at times. But work itself is good for us. We love to produce things and see results. That’s the way God made us. And in the heavenly world we will be busy and active serving God in whatever he wants us to do.

God’s purpose in the church is to show the universe the powers and works of God. Note Eph. 3:10: [read it]. Paul says that we are to judge angels (I Cor. 6:1-2). Could it be that the saints are “destined for a role of great significance in the coming ages as God’s great unfathomable purposes roll on into the mists of eternity and gather under them worlds and kingdoms yet unborn”? “Who can guess what heights we are destined to read in the service of our God in the coming ages?” (Bruce Milne, The End of the World, p. 125).

Fourth, heaven will be a perfect life.

“In the new age man will attain to the fullness of life for which he was originally destined. Man will find a perfection of relationship with God, with his neighbour, and with his environment and with himself. Man will perfectly glorify his maker and find full self-fulfillment. All that has spooked the attaining of these divinely intended ends in this life will be removed, sin, temptation, weakness and the rest, and man will be free again, as the ruler of the world and vice-regent of God, to attain the heights of moral and spiritual grandeur for which he was originally intended in the divine purpose (Gen. 1:28; Psa. 8:4-6.” (Bruce Milne, The End of the World, p. 126).

Someone asks, “If heaven is perfect, then why is there no sex in heaven since that is the ultimate physical and interpersonal joy here on earth?” Jesus said there would not be marriage in heaven, and this seems to indicate no sexual relationship since that is the arena of moral sex (Lk. 20:35). The perfect joy of having all our needs fulfilled and of being in ecstasy with God and the redeemed will replace the joys of this earthly life. C. S. Lewis once illustrated this by the story of a ten-year-old boy watching

his older sister and her boy friend on the living room sofa laughing and smiling and eating chocolates and kissing between bites. The little boy thinks that kisses are yucky and that the couple's happiness comes from eating the chocolates. However, the sister and her boy friend have greater joy and excitement from the kissing and the chocolates are just a sideline. Likewise, in the glory world the things that give us so much pleasure here will be far surpassed by the joys of knowing God. We will have perfect personal and interpersonal fellowship and connections that far surpasses any physical connections on this present earth.

Are there any activities on earth that we will continue to do in heaven? Yes. The very things that are the reason we are on earth to start with are things of the soul that distinguish us from the animals. Those two things are *knowing* and *loving*. These two activities are expressed toward three objects: God, others, and self. The six things then that we do on earth that will continue in heaven are as follows:

1. To know God
2. To love God
3. To know others
4. To love others
5. To know ourselves
6. To love ourselves

What we do on earth now resembles what we will do in heaven in a far greater way the same way a watermelon seed resembles a watermelon (Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004, p. 263).

Fifth, heaven will be an endless life. The Bible describes heaven like this, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The same word "eternal" is used to describe God's nature as it is to describe our life. As long as God is, we will be. and that is, forever and ever and ever. The boundlessness of God will be our boundlessness. We can describe heaven as that land where "we'll never grow old." There will be no more death, no more fatal accidents, no more cancer, no more heart attacks, no more incurable diseases, no more funeral services, and no more final farewells. God is going to put all the doctors, lawyers, funeral directors, police, locksmiths and preachers out of business (*smile*).

Some ask, "Will there be time in heaven?" Yes if time is defined as a succession of events and activities. When the angel said, "Time shall be no

more” (Rev. 10:6, KJV), the meaning is, “there shall be no more delay” (NIV, NRSV, NASB, NKJV). There will be singing in heaven (Rev. 5; 7) and singing takes beats and beats mean a succession of activity. The activities of service and productivity in heaven imply a progression of events. The activities of the various groups singing one after another demand a succession of events. The fact that the tree of life “yields its fruit each month” (Rev. 22:2) indicates a sequence of events. Heaven is “not the elimination of time itself, but the elimination of time limitations. No more deadlines! No more expiration dates! No more having to quit before the job is done! No more, ‘I just ran out of time!’” (Jack Cottrell, The Faith Once for All, p. 566).

Sixth, heaven will be a place, the new heavens and earth, and not just a state. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:3). An embodied spirit with form and structure must have a place. “If a person is *present*, then by definition there is a *place*, because to be ‘present’ means to be ‘located in this place.’” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 1159, n. 2).

Hear what the apostle Peter said about our new dwelling place: [read 2 Pet. 3:10-13]. God will send a cataclysmic event that will destroy the present earth with all its sin and imperfection. Does this mean that this present earth will be annihilated, vaporized, go totally out of existence, and that God will create ex nihilo (out of nothing) another earth? Or does this mean that God will purge this present earth, like he did in the flood of Noah, and present to us a renewed and purified earth? A very able, conservative theologian, Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988) in his book, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979) gives four reasons to support the concept of renewal versus annihilation.

1. The Greek word for “new” (*kainos*) in both 2 Pet. 3:10 and Rev. 21:1 means “new in nature or quality versus a different word for “new” (*neos*) which means “new in time or origin.” The word “new” then indicates a renewed universe, not a totally different one.
2. In Rom. 8:20-21, Paul argued for the present creation being liberated from corruption, not a totally different one.
3. The analogy of our present body having continuity with the transformed resurrected body indicates that the new earth will not be totally different but wondrously renewed.

4. If God has to totally annihilate his present creation which he declared “good” (Gen. 1:31), then Satan wins a great victory by so corrupting the present cosmos that God can do nothing but blot it out of existence. On the contrary, Satan has been defeated and will be destroyed. God will renew and purify this earth on which Satan deceived mankind and on which he worked his evil ways.

“This renewed creation is a real space/time universe and the earth on which we will dwell is a solid, bodily place located in the space of this universe. It is a place perfectly coordinated with and adapted to the nature of our (and Christ’s) new glorified bodies. We will be perfectly at home in this new environment.” (Jack Cottrell, The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today, Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002, pp. 565-566).

It could very well be that the type of earth that millenarians expect to last for only a 1,000 years will in many ways actually be the nature of the eternal new earth (Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 201-206, 275-276).

Those that are the most heavenly-minded are those that have the greatest earthly use. We believers work for a better world now. Our work for Christ now has the most value for this world and for the world to come. We live on the earth but we are preparing for life on God’s new earth and we are helping others prepare for it, too.

At the beginning of history God created the heavens and the earth, the first verse of the Bible. At the end of history, in the closing verses of the last page of the Bible, God makes the new heavens and the new earth which will far surpass in splendor all that we have seen or known before. At the very center of history and of eternity is the Lamb of God, who was slain, but is now the first-born from the dead and king of all kings and lord of all lords. Someday we will cast all our crowns before him and be lost in “wonder, love, and praise.”

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“The hope of dying is the only thing that keeps me alive.”

-Vance Havner

“I will live until I die and when I die I will live.”