



Title: Why Think About Heaven?

Text: Colossians 3:1-4, Revelation 21:1-3

Date: May 8, 2022

Main Idea: Set your hearts on things above and things to come.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXTS: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4, REVELATION 21:1-3

***This sermon series will be different since it covers a topic, not one specific text. These lessons will still be text-based but we will also focus on theological themes and ideas throughout the lessons as well.**

Highlight – What stands out?

1. As you think about heaven, what stood out to you as you read these texts?
2. Did you read any words, phrases, or ideas that were familiar to you? Any that were unfamiliar to you?
3. Did these passages remind you of any other passages you have read or studied before? Write those down.

Explain – What does this mean?

We are going to focus on two ideas from these two passages.

- The things that are above (Col. 3:1-4)
- God's dwelling place with man. (Rev. 21:1-3)

Seek the Things that Are Above:

1. In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul tells us twice to "seek the things that are above." Where and what are those things? Look up Eph. 1:20-23 and Hebrews 1:1-3 to help explain your answer.
2. It seems that there is a past, present, and future component to thinking about heaven. Look up 1 Peter 1:3-13 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. How do

these passages inform what it means to think about “things that are above”? What is the future component to thinking about heaven?

God’s Dwelling Place with Man:

1. Read Genesis 1, 3:8, and 3:22-24. What do these passages tell you about God’s original intent with his creation and what we currently experience?
2. Read Exodus 40:34, John 1:14, and Revelation 21:3. How does this help explain what heaven is like and why we should focus on understanding heaven?
3. On the continuum of Genesis 3 (leaving the Garden and God’s presence) and the promise of Revelation 21 (God dwelling among his people again), where are we today? Look up John 14:1-6. How do we get back to being in God’s presence?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Andy Davis says that heaven is not a static place but a “continual discovery of the glory of God¹.” How have you seen God explain his heavenly perspective in your life? How are you still waiting to see that perspective explained?
2. What does it look like to set your mind on the things of earth? What about the things of heaven? Make a list of both and ask how they influence your hope in Christ.
3. How have you seen the reality of living in a post-Genesis 3 (broken) world impact your ability to “seek the things that are above”? How have you seen that in the lives of others?
4. What comes to mind when you think about heaven?

¹ Davis, 21.

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. In what ways do you need to focus more on the “things above” right now?

2. Andy Davis says that “God wants to feed our hope every day with a sense that the future is bright based on the promises of God.²” Can you make a list of the promises and attributes of God that you know from scripture? Now pray that God would use this exercise to fuel your hope.

3. As we move into the summer months and focus as a church on widening our circle, who do you know who is currently “seeking the things of earth” instead of the “things above”? How can you help them? If you don’t know someone, spend some time thinking about your neighbors, co-workers, or places you frequently visit (restaurants, gym, stores) and ask God to bring people into your circle who need to lift their gaze heavenward.

² From correspondence.

Introduction and Chapter 1 from “The Glory Now Revealed”

Introduction

The book you are about to read is intended to be a foretaste of heaven. I yearn for it to be a journey of hope for you, because this world we are living in is drowning in a sea of hopelessness. People who do not know the grace of God through faith in Christ are said to be “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12 CSB). It is a devastating thing to be hopeless, because human beings are wired to be essentially forward-looking in our outlook. If we are truly convinced that the future is bleak, it is difficult to take another step in life. The Bible reveals that God has woven a sense of eternity into the hearts of all people (Eccles. 3:11), and that means we are constantly thinking about the future—where we are heading—and (perhaps secretly) even more about our eternal future.

Where We Begin

There are many conceptions about heaven floating around the worldwide marketplace of ideas. But only a biblical vision of heaven, constructed carefully from passages of God’s perfect Word, will in the end prove to be true. To conceive of a heaven based on vain imaginings and false doctrine will only lead many further on a path to destruction. But to drink in a pure vision of heaven based on scripture will build within us a hope that does not disappoint (Rom. 5:5).

In this book, we will learn about a heaven that is dynamic and eternally fascinating, and in which a large part of the experience will be continually learning more aspects of the glory of God. For most of my Christian life, I have had, defective view of heaven as being essentially static, in which we have been made perfect at death and learn in that instant everything we need to know about God, and then spend eternity basically in one place singing praise songs to God. As I have talked to other Christians, I have come to realize that this is how most of them viewed heaven as well.

No one wants to admit that this sounds boring and that such thoughts are actually a little depressing. Several people told me they just try to keep it simple: “I figure we’ll just die, go to heaven, and be happy. End of story.”

But I have found that this “boring” view of heaven is defective and unbiblical. And because it is defective and unbiblical, it is not very helpful for feeding Christian hope. Most of us have received a view of our eternal home that is truly disappointing. But “hope does not disappoint.” So it is time for us Christians to roll up our sleeves, work on the texts, and discover a dynamic view of heaven that will electrify us, empowering us to grow in holiness and be

energetic in sharing this hope with desperately lost people all around the world.

Jesus said to the Sadducees (who had a defective view of the afterlife as well), “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Journey with me to find out how much more the Scriptures have said about our eternal heavenly home than we have known before.

It is my deepest desire that this journey will energize your heart as never before to yearn for heaven, to store up treasure in heaven, and to rescue as many people as possible to join you in heaven.

Where We Are Headed

Now it is time to begin our discovery of some of what the Bible reveals about our future eternal home. We will walk through it step-by-step, looking at various aspects in turn. We will begin by seeking to prove from sound scriptural exegesis that we will remember earth's events in heaven (chapter 2). Then we will describe the astonishing transformation of our bodies, minds, and hearts in glorification, and how that transformation will make our eternal education in God's glory so perfectly satisfying to us (chapter 3).

In chapter 4, I will seek to argue that God will not merely tell us what he did in the past but will actually have the power to show it to us by vision. In chapter 5, we will discuss the powerful concept of heavenly rewards, and how these rewards will be directly tied to how we lived our lives on earth and will essentially afford unequal experiences of God's glory in heaven. In chapter 6, we will trace out with maddening brevity the stunning complexity of all of human history, knowing that in heaven alone will we have the time and capacity to take in the scope and dimensions of all the centuries and all the nations of history. Chapter 7 unfolds how all the heroes of church history will be properly honored in heaven. By contrast, chapter 8 focuses on obscure people and movements of church history, and how God will reveal what he did in and through each one. Chapter 9 discusses how God will finally reveal the spiritual dimensions—the angels and demons—of every single day of redemptive history. In chapter 10, we will have a foretaste of the heavenly review of our own personal lives—how God worked in us personally for his purposes.

Chapters 11 through 13 cover the three hardest topics for this concept of heavenly review: our sins, our sufferings, and the damned. Chapter 14 will make the case that remembering the history of evil in this world will be eternally essential to our hating it forever. Finally, chapter 15 concludes with an exhortation to gain as much of heavenly glory as we can by faith-filled exertions now.

Ready? Let's begin this journey together!

Chapter 1

Lost Treasures Reclaimed

For the countless multitude of the redeemed, heaven will be an eternal education in the glories of God. The redeemed will drink from an endless river of his glory, eat from a delightful tree of his glory, tour a vast museum of his glory, view a visionary theater of his glory, explore a limitless universe of his glory, bow before the throne of his glory, and stare unblinking and unblinded into the face of his glory. The more that Christians meditate now on this limitless inheritance, the more fruitfully we will live in this present evil age, and the more we will add particular treasures to his glory.

This treasure trove of God's glory has dimensions and details we have yet to ponder. Only an infinite subject can engage our perfected minds for an eternity of time. And the glory of God is that infinite subject. Heaven will consist in one brilliant moment of discovery after another. And that is truly a thrilling prospect! So a great part of our heavenly experience of God's glory will consist in his continual revelation of his mighty actions throughout history to redeem sinners from every nation on earth.

The End for Which God Created and Redeemed

The book of Revelation makes it plain that heaven will be illuminated by the glory of God. The new universe "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" (Rev.21:23). The New Jerusalem is designed to glow with the glory of God, for the city as a whole and the actual streets of the city are made of pure gold, like clear glass (vv.18, 21). This transparent gold will allow the glory of God to make it radiant, as will the varied jewels that make up the foundations of the walls and the pearls that make up the gates—everything in the city will be illuminated with the glory of God in Christ.

But what is "the glory of God"? It is the radiant display of his attributes. The word attributes answers the question, What is God like? God's attributes include his self-existence, perfection, holiness, love, omnipotence, omniscience, omni-presence, justice, mercy, patience, and wrath, among others. The "radiant display" of these attributes means that they shine before an audience; they are seen, savored, and celebrated. Sometimes the glory of God is directly connected with bright light, as when the angel appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of the Savior of the world, and his radiant light terrified them greatly (Luke 2:9). Sometimes the glory of God is revealed without any unusual visible light, as when Jesus died on the cross in an eerie darkness (Matt.27:45). Whenever the glory of God shines, some attributes of God are put on display before an audience—angels and/or humans, those whom God gave the ability to understand him and celebrate him for all he is worth.

This was the end, the reason, for which God created the world. Tragically, Adam led humanity into sin, so that instead of glorifying God, we “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom.1:25). Yet despite the devastation of Adam's sin, God's glory has triumphed, displayed in the rescue of a multitude of sinners from every nation and every era. No immense nebula in a distant galaxy, nor stretch of rocky cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, nor salmon making a thousand-mile journey upstream, nor even a heavenly chorus of a hundred million angels brings God more glory than the redemption of the sinners who will stand before his throne in eternity singing his praise.

Past, Present, and Future Glory

When this present age has ended and the new heaven and new earth have come, at that time our experience of God's glory will be divided into three categories: God's past glory, God's present glory, and God's future glory. At that time, God's past glory will be revealed in his mighty works throughout the history of the world; God's present glory will be revealed in his face, his throne, his angels, his people, New Jerusalem, and the new heaven and new earth; and God's future glory will be revealed in the unfolding events of life in the new universe.

Of God's future glory in heaven, the Bible says very little. There are indications of the saints ruling over cities, owning property, and doing glorious works. Revelation 21:25-26 states that the gates of New Jerusalem will always stand open and the glories of the nations will stream into it, perhaps implying the fruitful labors of our resurrected hands and perfect minds. Beyond this I do not wish to speculate.

God's present glory in heaven is what most Christians think about when they think about "heaven," the eternal future to which we are all heading. The greatest glory of heaven will be the face of God himself (Rev.22:4). This "beatific vision" will be the consummation of all heavenly blessedness, joy, and pleasure. Christ will be the greatest display of the glory of God, "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb.1:3).

However, God will have much glory to show us in his creation as well. The most glorious will be the redeemed themselves, who will “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). And the new earth will be spectacular, more than present words can describe. We will spend eternity discovering and exploring the staggering beauties of nature in that perfect world. I have seen even in this present cursed world such glories as to take my breath away: the purples and oranges of a sunset over the Grand Canyon; the majestic snow-covered peaks of the Karakoram Mountains in Pakistan; the sun-splashed beauty of a field of wildflowers near the Eiger north face in Switzerland; the deep sound of the wind blowing over the rocky coastline of Acadia National Park in Maine; the rich, musky smell of an old-growth forest in

the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. How much more glorious will be the new earth, liberated at last from its bondage to decay (Rom.8:21).

The heavenly review of God's past glory is what this book will unfold. For all eternity, God will be unveiling various aspects of the astonishing works he did in this present age. And though this book is dedicated to our heavenly history lesson, I believe that our experience in heaven will unite all three aspects of God's glory—past, present, and future—in one central theme: the infinite greatness of our triune God!

The Treasures of the Empire Put on Display

The rulers of the earth love to overwhelm visitors to their capital cities through lavish displays of their glory. The wise city plans, grand architecture, wide avenues, museums containing trophies of military conquests in distant lands, beautiful parks, triumphant arches and statues, soaring gilded spires—all proclaim the greatness of the rulers and their empires. This is the way it has been since humans began our history of conquest.

Caesar Augustus boasted, “I found Rome a city of bricks, and left it a city of marble.”³ In 1275, when Marco Polo visited Xanadu, the capital city of Kublai Khan's Mongolian Empire, he was stunned by the size of its assembly hall, which could easily seat six thousand. “Its roof is vermilion, yellow, green, and blue, and the tiles fixed with a varnish so fine that they shine like crystal and can be seen from a great distance.”⁴ King Solomon's glories so overwhelmed the Queen of Sheba that “there was no more breath in her” (1 Kings 10:5). From his palace roof, King Nebuchadnezzar boasted of his skill as a conqueror, architect, city planner, and visionary leader: “Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?” (Dan. 4:30 CSB). And Persian Emperor Xerxes sumptuously displayed the glories of his empire in Susa for six full months, culminating in a seven-day banquet for his nobles (Esther 1:4-7)

What human rulers have done from vainglory, God will do for the eternal delight of his people. Unlike the brief visit made by the Queen of Sheba or an evening walk on a rooftop palace or even 180 days of feasting, God will place the glories of his kingdom on display for all eternity. And while Caesar chose marble for his majestic structures and Kublai Khan vermilion tiles to decorate his soaring roof, God's chosen medium of his artistry is people, and the rays of his glory will shine in the innumerable powerful works he did to save his chosen people throughout history.

Thousands of Years of Thousands of Years

Who can fully appraise the treasures of God's glory woven into even a single day of history? We all underestimate the value of those treasures! The Bible makes this amazing assertion about time: “With the Lord one day is as a

³ C. Suetonius Tranquillus, “chapter 29,” *Divis Augustus*.ed. Alexander Thomason.

⁴ Carrie Gracie, “Kublai Khan: China's Favourite Barbarian,” *BBC News Magazine*, October 9, 2012.

thousand years” (2 Pet. 3:8). It is as though God sees every single second of history in extreme slow motion. Every flap of a hummingbird's wing, every flutter of a leaf in a summer storm, every glance of an eye or gesture of a hand on the entire surface of the earth is intimately studied by God. As Job said, “Does he not see my ways and number all my steps?” (Job 31:4). The activity of any single day is utterly mindboggling: all over the world, human beings are speaking, acting, making choices, creating. And God is there, watching and recording everything.

But Scripture goes beyond a simple assertion of God's presence and awareness. The doctrine of providence teaches that God is acting decisively through the greatest and smallest events to bring about his sovereign purposes. He controls the casting of a lot (Prov.16:33) and the decisions of a king (21:1). He oversees the death of a sparrow (Matt. 10:29) and the birth of a mountain goat (Job 39:1). He chooses the time and circumstances of our birth as well as our death, numbering all the days in between (Ps. 139:16). He acts in ways that are incomprehensible to us, and his footsteps can-not be tracked (Rom. 11:33). The daily actions of God are immeasurable and worthy of praise: secretly restraining tyrants, directing the complex flow of international commerce, answering the prayers of a child, protecting persecuted house church leaders, convicting Christians of secret sin, preparing the tribal leader of an unreached people group to come to Christ, orchestrating the initial meeting of a man and woman who will someday be married.

The sovereign salvation plan of God was crafted before the foundation of the world, bought at infinite cost by the blood of his Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit to individuals in every generation and in every corner of the world. Every day, that plan generates unique treasures . . . thousands of years of thousands of years.

How God's Treasures Have Been Lost

But most details of that plan are hidden from human view, forgotten by succeeding generations, lost through the death of eyewitnesses, and buried under the rise and rubble of nations. God is temporarily deprived of the glory he deserves for both his mighty and minute deeds.

The vast majority of God's glorious deeds in history have never been recorded in any book and never will be. They were performed in the obscure lives of people the world would consider unremarkable—“not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor. 1:26). These ranks of the redeemed received amazing grace poured on them, and their stories are well worth learning to the glory of God. Yet not only are those stories lost to posterity but the full dimensions of God's activities in saving their souls were often veiled from them as well. They never fully realized how God orchestrated providential occurrences in space and time to bring them to faith in Christ and to help them grow in grace after that.

But why should God be robbed of his glory by having those works hidden forever, lost in the dust of the past?

Heaven Will Be Dynamic

My conception of heaven is of a dynamic place full of thrilling activity. Glorified people will *grow and develop*. I once thought of glorification as immediate completion in every area of humanity, including knowledge. That would mean it would be impossible for a glorified person to learn any-thing at all, as if at glorification we receive an instantaneous and infinite download of all possible information and then remain static for all eternity.

We will never be God, not even in glory. So, we will never be omniscient. There will always be something new to learn. But God does not learn. As I've heard one pastor put it, "Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?"⁵ For all eternity, new things about God's glory will occur to us! And that will make heaven a very exciting place.

In his marvelous book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn opened my eyes to the delights of a dynamic view of heaven.⁶As he was doing research on the topic, he encountered many Christians who were dreading going to heaven. The shabby cartoonish conceptions of heaven poured into them from childhood were hardly appealing: sitting on a cloud forever and ever, strumming a harp, and singing "Amazing Grace" with a heavenly choir. And as the lyrics to that wonderful hymn imply, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sit on this cloud and strum this harp than when we've first begun." Such a static vision of heaven is depressing to many, and with good reason: it seems an eternal existence of suspended animation, frozen in unchanging "perfection."

Recently I read a disturbing article entitled "Ten Reasons Christian Heaven Would Actually Be Hell." It argues that an eternity of unchanging perfection would be depressing:

Much of what makes life worth living is the process of learning and discovery, growth and change. We delight in novelty and laugh when we are startled by the unexpected. Curiosity is one of our greatest pleasures, and growth is one of our deepest values and satisfactions. ...By contrast, timeless perfection is static...it means there is no room for improvement-for change and growth. Perfection is sterile in every sense of the word.⁷

But if we accept the concept of a continual discovery of the glory of God, then our conception of heaven becomes incredibly appealing. It also helps explain

⁵ I heard this statement from Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Church, Chicago, in a private conversation at a Gospel Coalition stakeholders meeting on the campus of Trinity Divinity School in 2006. Since then, I have heard others say Adrian Rogers said it in a sermon.

⁶ *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn, pages 5-6

⁷ Valerie Tarico, "Ten Reasons Christian Heaven Would Actually be Hell," Salon, February 1, 2015.

Isaiah 9:7: “Of the increase of his government ... there will be no end.” Since there will be no babies born in heaven, this endless increase must consist in an ever-deepening sense of the glories of Christ's kingly reign. If the redeemed will be continually then the inhabitants of his kingdom will become wealthier and wiser for all eternity.

Against Heavenly Amnesia

Some immigrants arriving at New York's Ellis Island in the nineteenth century were glad to change their names and sever their cord to the past. Some were running from their actions or from the conditions of the Old World: people seeking to escape justice for their crimes, people stuck in a socio. economic cycle of poverty from which there was no escape, people experiencing a war or famine that drove them to sell everything to buy a one-way ticket to America. And when they disembarked in New York, they were eager to start fresh, with no ties to the past.

In the same way, some Christians look forward to leaving this painful world entirely behind and sailing on to a new shore. They delight in a future world, a fresh start not haunted by their past. They think of the sadness of their lives on earth and ask, “Why wouldn't we desire a completely cleansed memory when we arrive in heaven?” Three categories of painful memories especially seem to beg for heavenly amnesia: our sins, our sufferings, and our loved ones who were condemned to hell. It seems beneficial to reboot the glorified human mind with a completely wiped memory, like the purge done to a smartphone when you sell it—wiped forever of all your data.

But such a comprehensive forgetting would rob God of his glory and our joy in the redemption of his people. Increased heavenly understanding of earthly history will in turn increase our heavenly joy. This eternal education in history will be glorious! We will be so free from selfish concerns for our reputations that we will finally see God at the glorious center of it all—the Redeemer, Protector, Warrior, Ruler, Healer, Feeder, Author, Perfecter—in a word, the Savior worthy of all praise. That's the point of it all, the end for which God both created and redeemed the world.



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

What comes to mind when you think about heaven?

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⁸ Davis, 21.

⁹ From correspondence.

Additional Resources:

Video: [Heaven and Earth: The Bible Project](#)

Podcast: [Andy Davis interview on Baptist 21](#)

Book: [God Dwells Among Us by G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim](#)

Sermon: [The Facts of Life \(sermon on Colossians 3:1-4 by Dale Ralph Davis\)](#)