

Systematic Theology
Then I Saw A New Heaven and A New Earth, Part 1
Selected Scriptures
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You know, it's hard for most people to get excited about heaven. I think frankly when most people think of heaven, and the way I used to think of heaven, doesn't make it very appealing. It's a very common belief that there is going to be a future for those who are righteous. The definition of righteous may vary quite a bit. The poll that I'm citing is from *Newsweek*. I'm sure the definitions are quite different. But a *Newsweek* poll near the end of the last century reported that seventy-seven percent of Americans believe that there is a place called heaven, but most made it clear that they had no interest in talking about it or going there anytime soon. The reason for that of course is, first of all, many of them are not in Christ and don't really have that hope and expectation. They fear death and live in the dread of death and the process. But beyond that, many have flawed views of what heaven is really like. In fact, I think there are many Christians who have similarly flawed views. Most people's view of heaven comes complete with halos, with wings, and just sort of floating around on clouds and playing harps for eternity. Now I don't have anything against the harp. I enjoy others playing it, but it's hard for me to get excited about that picture. Fortunately, however, while that may be a common human perception of eternity, it bears absolutely no resemblance to how we will actually spend eternity according to the Bible.

There's another confusion that we need to clear up right away and that is that most Christians, I think, think that we will live forever in heaven as it's described in Revelation 4 and 5 and where it currently is. That's not what the Bible teaches either as we'll learn over these next two weeks. That's not where we will be during eternity and that's why we need to study it together.

When theologians start to talk about what our eternal circumstances will be like, they call it the "eternal state." Now let me remind you of where we are in our study. That top column is a little lighter than I thought it would be, but you can still make it out, I hope. You can see running across the middle from left to right is an *ordo eschatos* that we put together; that is, an order of

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the last things. Of course, it begins with our death. Unless the Lord returns, that will be the next item on the eschatological agenda followed by what theologians call the “intermediate state;” that is, what happens to us after death, but before our Lord returns. Our soul at that point will be in heaven. The body will be in the grave. And that is of an unknown duration because we have no idea when Christ will come.

We believe, as we studied together, that that will be followed by the rapture—the resurrection of all believers. And that immediately will be followed by seven years of terrible and intense wrath of God poured out upon the earth, the most intense being the final three-and-a-half years. We, during those seven years, will be in heaven.

As we move along from left to right, the next item that we come to in our little timeline after that seven-year period of tribulation is the second coming of Jesus Christ—when He comes not for His church, but this time when He comes in glory. He puts His feet upon the Mount of Olives, He defeats His enemies and He establishes His kingdom. We will be with Him according to Revelation 19. We will return to the earth with Him. That will be an event that will occur.

Following the second coming and several other smaller features that I won’t bother us with right now, we move on to the millennium. The millennium follows the second coming and that is the literal thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth, this earth, renewed for that purpose. And we will be on earth with Christ during those thousand years. We will reign with Him as we learned together.

Following the thousand-year period—you remember that Satan is bound for that period of time—following the thousand years, he will be released according to Revelation 20 for a short time. He will lead many of those who are unregenerate, who have grown up during that thousand-year period but have not embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior. He will lead them in a rebellion against the King and our Lord will put down that rebellion.

And that will be immediately followed by the great white throne judgment. We will be present there to witness, but we will not be judged at the great white throne judgment. As we saw, that is

a judgment strictly for unbelievers. All unbelieving dead and all unbelievers will be there to appear before Jesus Christ and they will be cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20, verses 11 through 15 says.

Following that judgment, we begin eternity. We begin what theologians call the “eternal state.” Last week, we examined the eternal state of the wicked. It’s a terrible place of conscious suffering forever separated from all that’s good and from goodness itself in the person of our God. While He will be there, we’re told that they will suffer forever in the presence of the Lamb according to Revelation; nevertheless, He will not be there to bless. He will not be there in any way to demonstrate His presence to them. They will endure forever what the apostle John calls the wrath of the Lamb.

But tonight, it’s our joy to talk about the eternal state not of the wicked, but of the righteous. All of those who are righteous not with their own righteousness as we learned this morning—not with our righteousness because all our righteousness is filthy rags before God, but with the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to our account. All of those who, who have embraced Him as Lord and Savior have had His righteousness credited to their account. They are righteous with His righteousness and they have a wonderful eternity to look forward to. We anticipate an eternal state and that will be in the new heaven and the new earth.

Now before we get to the new heaven and the new earth, we need to back up a step and take a look at the destruction of the current universe. We live in an expendable planet. We are to be good stewards of it. We’re commanded to do that. Man was put in the Garden to do that. But eventually, God Himself will destroy the universe in which we live. In a number of places in both Old and New Testaments, the Bible makes it clear of that very thing.

Now as we look at these texts, keep in mind that when the Bible speaks of the heavens and the earth, it’s referring to the entire created universe, the visible physical universe. That’s what is meant by the heavens and the earth, the heavens being the visible physical sky—that is, the intergalactic, interstellar universe in which this planet exists. In Psalm 102, we begin to get hints of this reality that this current universe will be destroyed. Psalm 102, verses 25 and 26: “Of old

[the psalmist says] You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.”

In Isaiah 34, verse 4, “All the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree.” These are graphic images of death, of the cessation of existence.

You find the same thing when you come to Isaiah 51, verse 6, “Lift up your eyes to the sky, then look to the earth beneath; for the sky will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not wane.”

Matthew 24, our Lord said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 26, the writer of Hebrews says, “And God’s voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN’”—the entire universe. “This expression, ‘yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”

In Revelation chapter 20, verse 11—we looked at this a couple of weeks ago: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away.” Now you might think for a moment that that’s merely a poetic expression—that the created universe was so terrified in the presence of Jesus Christ that it wanted to run and hide. But the next expression gives us the hint that there’s more involved than that because it says, “and no place was found for them.” They literally ceased to exist. And Revelation 21, verse 1, John writes, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.”

Now there’s a lot of debate among theologians about whether the current universe as we know it will be absolutely annihilated and God will begin fresh with totally new matter or whether the

current universe will instead be cleansed and renovated with fire, but not destroyed. In other words, is the current universe a remodel or a teardown? That's what the debate really centers on. Now there are many men I respect on both sides of this question, so I don't think we ought to be dogmatic about it. Much of it really comes down to which verses you decide to emphasize.

For example, there are some verses that seem to imply that all that needs to happen is the earth needs to be cleaned and remodeled. Matthew chapter 19, verse 28, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Now as we've studied before, I think this verse probably refers to the millennium, that thousand-year reign of Christ, not to the eternal state. But regardless, you can see where this sort of hint of a renovation comes from.

In Acts chapter 3, verse 21, the same sort of thing. Peter's sermon there, he says, "heaven [and earth] must receive [Jesus] until the period of the restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." Again, I believe this is describing the millennium, not the eternal state. But if you don't believe in a millennium, you can see why this verse may cause you to think that the current earth is merely going to be renovated, remodeled and cleaned.

Another text is Romans chapter 8 where Paul describes the current creation waiting eagerly to be restored. He says, "the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." It seems to imply something less than a total annihilation.

But on the other hand, there are verses that seem to very clearly say this current earth and universe will be destroyed and God will make something entirely new. Hebrews chapter 1, quoting the Old Testament, says, "THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED." Now get the picture of changing a garment. When you change a

garment, you take one off and you put another on. It implies entire change, not adding a couple of buttons, cleaning and adding a couple of buttons to an existing garment. And so, the picture implies something entirely new.

But perhaps the clearest, I think, is 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 10, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” That certainly to me implies destruction.

The same thing we saw in Revelation 20. But when you look at Revelation 21:1—turn there for a moment. For me, this seals it. Revelation 21:1. Notice what the apostle John says, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” Now again, if you take those words for “new” you can argue that that means a renovated earth. It’s new in the sense that it’s been renovated. But notice the language that he uses next: “for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.” Where the word “first” occurs, what is the implication? There is a second. Now you could say, “Well, okay, but it’s legitimate to refer to a completely renovated earth as the second earth.” Okay, but notice the word used in verse 1—“passed away.” The first heaven and the first earth passed away. Then notice how John uses the exact same Greek word just three verses later down in verse 4: “[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” Now you tell me. Is crying and death and mourning and pain renovated and remodeled and made better for the new world or are they caused to cease to exist? It seems to me that in an immediate context here, John is using these words in the same sense. Whatever it means in verse 4 it means in verse 1 so the universe as we know it, seems clear to me, will cease to exist in an act of uncreation. As we learned several weeks ago, that will happen at the time of the great white throne judgment. This universe will cease to exist. It will be uncreated at that time.

And 2 Peter chapter 3 tells us how. Turn there with me. We didn’t look at this in detail a few weeks ago, but I want to tonight because you need to understand what God’s plan is. Here we have detailed for us exactly how it’s going to happen. Look first at verse 7. In context here, Peter

is warning about the coming day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is an Old Testament concept that the Jewish believers would've understood. There is coming a time that's God's day when He settles all the accounts, when He enters into human history and sets everything right, when He brings deliverance for His own and when He brings unspeakable wrath upon those who are His enemies. That's the day of the Lord. And He's promising them that that's coming in spite of, verse 3, mockers saying, "Well, when's He going to come? I mean everything's continuing the same since it's always been." And he gives them several examples that God has intervened in human history before, namely the Flood being the most graphic. And He will again. Verse 7, "by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." So, the present heavens and earth are being reserved by God for fire.

Now verse 10 expands on that concept. Go down to verse 10, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief"—that is, unexpected, unannounced and with devastating consequences. And this conflagration that will result will include the heavens—that's the visible physical realm of, as I said, interstellar and intergalactic space—and it also includes, verse 10, "the earth and its works"—this entire planet and everything connected with it.

You know, the picture is really a graphic one. You remember in the Old Testament a number of times God said that He was going to have to run the children of Israel out of the land of Israel so that He could allow the ground itself to be cleansed over many years, that their sin had almost, as it were, polluted the ground on which they walked. You almost get that picture here, that God is saying this world that I created very good (Genesis 1) has become utterly contaminated by the people who lived here, like a bunch of lepers who have left everything in wreck. I have to destroy it all and start from scratch.

How's He going to do it? Verse 7 says by fire. Notice, verse 10, what this looks like: "the heavens will pass away with a roar." This is an interesting Greek word, this word "roar." It's an onomatopoeic word—that is, a word that sounds like what it means. It has the sense of a whirring, buzzing roar. A loud rushing sound may be the best way to describe it. "And the

elements” verse 10 says, “the elements”—this is a reference to the basic building blocks of the universe—“will be destroyed with intense heat, and” verse 10 adds this planet “will be burned up.”

God used the plentiful resource of water once, didn't He? This earth is seventy percent water and He used the abundance of water to destroy the surface of the earth in a flood. And in the same way, Peter tells us here God will use the elements in the current universe as the tools for its destruction.

Scientists estimate that the core of our earth consists of molten rock that may be as hot as twelve thousand degrees. They conjecture that the surface of the earth as we know it, the crust of the earth, is about ten miles thick. Ten miles is all that separates us from a raging inferno with molten rock at twelve thousand degrees. But lift your eyes to the heavens. Look at the sun in our solar system. And then get a telescope and look beyond our solar system at galaxies or beyond the solar system to other galaxies. And you look out and you see that the universe is filled with burning, flaming planets or stars like ours, like our sun. But even more to the point, over the last hundred years, scientists have discovered that the atomic structure of creation itself makes our universe, the entire universe, one huge nuclear bomb. So apparently at some point in the future at the decision of God, this universe will be consumed with an atomic chain reaction and will literally cease to exist.

And what will replace it? Well, according to Scripture, a new heaven and a new earth. We first learn about this when we turn to the pages of the Old Testament. Even in the Old Testament, this was promised. Isaiah chapter 65, verse 17—as you reach the end of Isaiah's prophecy where he talks about last things, he says, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.” What I make will be so amazing, so overwhelming, that what you knew before won't even come to mind.

Isaiah 66, verse 22, “‘For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so your offspring and your name will endure.’” God says, “I'm

going to make a permanent world, a permanent universe, a new heaven and a new earth that I'll never destroy. It'll always exist and I'm going to ensure that."

You turn to the New Testament and you see this prophesied. In 2 Peter, the very passage we were just looking at, verse 13 of chapter 3, he says: "But according to [God's] promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." So, both testaments promise that this current universe will be destroyed, and a new universe will emerge like a phoenix from the ashes—a new heaven and a new earth.

So, what will it be like? Well, the Bible doesn't satisfy our curiosity on this front very much. It does give us a lot to think about and a lot to anticipate. And in the rest of our time tonight and particularly next week, we'll look in detail. I want us to examine what it will be like. First of all, and this is important, one thing the New Testament makes it clear is that it will be a real physical place. Our Lord has a glorified physical body that was able to be touched and to be felt, that certainly wasn't limited in the way our bodies are limited, but nevertheless could eat food, could be recognized. We will as well and we will live in a physical place, a real place.

In John 14, Jesus, referring to His departure—this is the night in the upper room before His crucifixion. He tells His disciples, He's just told them what's going to happen and to comfort them, He says listen, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." So here Jesus says, "I'm going to go in My glorified body and I'm going to come and I'm going to be somewhere and I'm going to take you where I am." Talking about real places, not imaginary ones—the new heavens and the new earth where heaven and earth are married together as we'll discover next week, is a place. It's a real physical place where you can put your feet on terra firma as it were.

Generally, it's described to be like God's presence. It is God's presence. Heaven is wherever God is and since God's presence is always a place of unending, unmitigated joy, the eternal state will be as well. I love Psalm 16:11. This is one of my favorite verses. This is what we can anticipate. This is heaven. This is the eternity that awaits us. This is the new heavens and the new

earth. “In Your presence”—if that’s all the verse said, that would be enough, wouldn’t it? In Your presence, but he goes on to say, “In Your presence is fullness of joy;” absolutely overwhelming joy, nothing like we can experience here. What we experience here in the most fulfilling joyous moments of life are only faint, flickering shadows of the joys of heaven and “In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” If you want to know what the new heavens and the new earth will be like, generally speaking, there you have it in a nutshell—fullness of joy, pleasures forever in the presence of our God.

The details that we have of the eternal state come almost exclusively, and appropriately I should say, from the last two chapters of our Bible. And I want to go through those in detail next week. But to finish our time together tonight, I want us to consider just a couple of implications of the reality that you and I are going to live in a new heavens and a new earth. How should this impact us? What difference should this make? The Bible doesn’t give us prophecy to excite our curiosity. When the Holy Spirit, through the inspiration of the Spirit through the writings of the Scripture, gives us anticipation of the future, it’s for a purpose. So, what is the purpose? What are the purposes?

Well, here are just a couple to consider. First of all, don’t get too connected to this world. Instead, stay focused on godliness and holy conduct and live in anticipation of our Lord’s coming. You may still be in 2 Peter. If not, turn back there, 2 Peter chapter 3. Right after verse 10 we were just looking at of all that God is going to do in destroying this current universe, notice what he says in verse 11, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way”—all what things? Everything, everything around you. The only thing that will enter eternity is God and people. Think about that for a moment. Let me say that again. The only thing in your world that will enter eternity is God and the people around you. And he says since everything else is to be destroyed in this way, “what sort of people ought you to be?” And then he answers the question. Here’s what you really ought to care about. You ought to care about holy conduct and godliness. You ought to care about pleasing God because none of this other stuff matters. It’s all going to be burned up. What are you giving your life for? And instead, verse 12 says I want you to live looking. I want you to live “looking for and hastening”—both of those images have the idea of

an eager anticipation of “the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”

You say wait a minute. I’m supposed to eagerly look forward to that? You see, for most of the world, the idea of the universe exploding in one great atomic cataclysm is a terrible thought. But for us it’s not, because for us, we know that simply puts us closer home, closer to the new heavens and the new earth. Notice what he says, verse 13, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” By the way, the word “dwells” there in the Greek text is an interesting word. It’s a word that you could paraphrase this way. It’s at home. It’s a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness is perfectly at home. There’s righteousness in this world. If you’re in Christ, you carry righteousness with you because you have His righteousness. You also have what are called the “righteous acts of the saints,” the good works that we’re supposed to demonstrate. There’s righteousness in this world, but it sure doesn’t belong here and it sure doesn’t feel at home here. But there’s coming a new heavens and a new earth when righteousness will be at home. So, he says live in anticipation of that. Let me just ask you. Do you live in anticipation of that great reality?

A second implication is understand that God intends for us to live in eager anticipation of being in our eternal home. This is like the first, but slightly different. God wants you to eagerly anticipate your eternal existence in the new heavens and the new earth. Turn to Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 9—let’s start at verse 8. This, of course, is the great chapter recording the demonstration of the faith of the Old Testament saints urging the Christians to whom the writer of Hebrews wrote to stay committed to faith, not to give up their pursuit of Christ even in the face of the onslaught of Judaism around them. So, he says in verse 8, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” In other words, in light of eternity, don’t be so concerned with your circumstances here. Abraham lived with that expectation. He lived in tents. He never really got

all that God promised that he and his descendants would get. He got ultimately—the promise of course was fulfilled; God kept His word. But Abraham didn't see it.

Notice, by the way, that some say verse 10 is talking about the earthly city of Jerusalem, that he was really eager to see himself established in the land of Israel. That's not at all what it's saying here. This is talking about eternal presence of God sort of stuff. Look at verse 13, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on earth." Abraham said, "I'm just a stranger in exile here." He wasn't at home in Israel any more than you and I are home in America. Verse 14,

For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return [watch verse 16, here's the key to the whole thing]. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

You know what this is saying about Abraham? Abraham wasn't all into that piece of land over there in the Middle East. That wasn't what he was living for. He was living for a city that has foundations, whose builder and architect is God, a heavenly city. That's what allowed him to live by faith and do what he did. And that's how we're to live as well. We're to live enduring the circumstances we face here looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker, builder and architect is God.

When I travel internationally, and those of you who've travelled in remote areas internationally and I don't often do that but occasionally do that, sometimes I find myself in very difficult circumstances. This was especially true on several trips I took back in the nineties. I'm thinking of places like the Baptist Guest House in Calcutta, India, thinking of the brutal hot tropical nights of Manila, a hostel in New Delhi. And many of you have faced far more difficult circumstances than those. One of the things that helps me deal with the difficult circumstances when I'm away

and travelling is the fact that it's only a short time and soon, I'll be home—back with family, back in my own bed, back in the comforts that come with home. And that's exactly how we're supposed to think about our eternal home. God wants us to face whatever circumstances He calls us to face here, however difficult they may be, remembering that it's only for a short time and soon, we'll be home.

English Puritan Richard Baxter, in his book *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, wrote these words, “Why are not our hearts continually set on heaven? Why dwell we not there in constant contemplation? Bend your soul to study eternity, busy yourself about the life to come, habituate yourself to such contemplations, and let not those thoughts be seldom and cursory, but bathe yourself in heaven's delights.”

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* put it like this: “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one.” And that's exactly right.

A third implication that we have to consider is we must be willing in light of the new heavens and new earth, in light of our eternal home, to be willing to suffer the reproach of Christ here. Turn over a couple of pages to Hebrews 13 and verse 13. Let's start back at verse 12, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood [of course, talking here about His death], suffered outside the gate.” Now he's talking here about the reality that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem. But he's implying more here. He's implying that Jesus was shut out from Judaism. He was shut out of the spiritual leadership of Israel. He suffered outside of Judaism. He was, in a very real sense, excommunicated as a heretic and a blasphemer.

Of course, the tie-in is to the Old Testament. Those animals that were offered on the brazen altar as sin offerings I talked about this morning—they were not eaten. You remember, in some cases, some of the sacrifices were eaten. There was kind of a communal meal between the sacrificer and God. That didn't happen with the sin offerings. Instead, the remnant of the animal that

wasn't burned on the altar was burned outside the camp. And so, the picture is of Jesus, our great sin offering, suffering outside the camp. But as I said, the picture is more than just outside the city of Jerusalem. It also implies outside of respectable religion, outside of respectability, outside of everything. Those to whom Hebrews was written were being called to leave Judaism as they knew it and go outside Israel as it were. And with that exodus or perhaps excommunication came shame and reproach just as it came to Christ by being shunned by the Jewish establishment. And the writer of Hebrews is telling them you must be willing to face it. Verse 13, "let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." The writer of Hebrews is saying, "Listen, here's what I'm calling you to do. If you embrace Jesus Christ as your Messiah, it is going to put you outside of traditional Judaism. It's going to put you in a place where you are shunned by all who have loved you and with whom you have had intercourse through life. You must be willing to face it. Let us go outside the camp with Jesus, suffering the same reproach He did, outside the establishment, outside acceptability."

The same thing is true for us. We must be willing to face the same kind of reproach for Jesus' sake. In other words, in our day, we must be willing to face the shame, the ridicule, the insults and occasionally the persecution that goes with being followers of Jesus Christ. You know what I'm talking about—as you walk past someone smirks at the office. Maybe someone makes a crack about you being "holier than thou." Jokes are told behind your back. How did they develop that kind of mindset in the writer of Hebrews' time and how can we develop that kind of mindset—that we're willing to go outside of the camp and suffer the reproach of Christ? Look at verse 14, "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." We just learned a few minutes ago back in chapter 11 what we're talking about here. We're talking about that great eternal city, the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal city who has foundations whose builder and architect is God. We can go outside the camp and suffer reproach because we recognize that here in this world, we're just a passin' through. We have no lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. That's how you develop a mindset. And I've often wondered this in my own life. If the Lord should bring more difficult times for Christians in our country, how do you face that? Here's how they faced it. Here's how the writer of Hebrews urged them to face it: Remember this isn't where you belong. This isn't home. You're

here for a short time. Endure what you have to endure here. Endure the suffering. Endure the reproach with your eyes on the city which has foundations, whose builder and architect is God.

I've not had to do this, but I can tell you that saints through the history of the church have clung to this very truth. One of those is a man named John Bradford. He lived in the 1500's. Less than five months before he was burned to death, burned at the stake for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, this is what he wrote to a friend. This is what kept him faithful and true to God. He wrote, "I am assured that though I am in want here, I have riches there. Though I hunger here, I shall have fullness there. Though I faint here, I shall be refreshed there. And though I be counted here as a dead man, I shall there live in perpetual glory." You know what Bradford was saying? He was saying, "Listen, I can endure the conditions here, whatever comes, because I'm on my way home."

You know, as we study what the Bible teaches about our final home, it's difficult for us to really grasp it and to really be attracted to it, to understand how attractive our eternity will be—how wonderful, how beautiful, how overwhelmingly joyful. It's impossible really for us to fully comprehend. C.S. Lewis likens our desire to cling to this life to the little boy who when offered all the joys of married love in exchange for his candy bar decides to cling to his candy bar. Why? Because he knows he enjoys the one, but he has no categories with which to evaluate the other.

I don't know about you, but there's much here in this world that I think is spectacularly beautiful. And it's hard for me to imagine something that I would like so much better. Here's one way I've tried to help myself think of this in recent days, to think of the similarity of this world to the next one. One of my favorite places on the planet, on this planet, is Yosemite. If you've ever been there, you've likely taken the drive up through the southern entrance to the park along a winding road for some thirty miles thinking that you will never get to those really super spectacular views that you've seen all your life. And then, you come upon a tunnel. After thirty miles of winding road, you come to this tunnel. And for about a quarter mile, you drive through this rock tunnel cut right through the heart of a mountain. It's dark and relatively unattractive.

And then suddenly, after that quarter mile, you emerge from the tunnel and before you lies the expansive view of Yosemite Valley Floor. And it just takes your breath away.

Think of this world, with all of its beauty and all of its joys, as the tunnel. If you had grown up all of your life in the tunnel and it's all you knew, you would appreciate certain things about it. It would have a beauty to you all of its own, certain of its places would hold wonderful memories. And it would in certain ways give you a glimpse of the glory of the Creator. But someday, when our Lord makes a new heaven and a new earth, it will be like stepping out of that tunnel into the full expression of His beauty and His creative power. That's a world worth waiting for and worth living for. And according to the Word of God, it's just around the next turn. Let's pray together.

Father, we confess to You that we have not lived like Abraham lived. We have not lived in eager anticipation of the world to come. We have not lived here willing to be aliens and strangers and pilgrims just passing through this world, not tied down, willing to suffer reproach and hardship and difficulty because we're on our way home, on our way home to a city You've made, a city of which You are architect and builder.

Father, forgive us for our shallow Christianity. Help us to sink our roots deep into the reality that this earth and the universe as we know it You will one day destroy. But then, You will make a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness is perfectly at home and in which Your beauty and Your amazing power are put on display beyond what we can conceive. Father, pry our fingers away from the candy bar and help us to see that someday we'll truly be home. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.