

New Heavens and a New Earth (part 2)

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[0:00] Perhaps some of you have been in such places in Cleveland or Chicago. And then just in time, the tow truck arrives and its driver, a genial man, begins to hook up the disabled car.

The thugs protest. After all, the truck driver is interrupting their meal. And so the driver takes the leader of the group aside and attempts a five-sentence introduction to metaphysics.

Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without asking you if I can.

And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you ripping him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here. And it's in that way that Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., introduces the title of his book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*.

A withering account of sin's dread effects upon our world. It's not the way it's supposed to be. And just to live another week in our world, to watch the news another week in our world, is to have many reminders of this very fundamental fact about our universe and about our world, that things are indeed not the way they're supposed to be.

[1:54] Maybe even the truck driver can sense it. We saw it this week, didn't we?

The hurricane. Maybe it was something as small as a minor irritation, but it was another reminder that things aren't the way they're supposed to be.

Maybe something with regard to your health. Maybe something at work. We have birth disorders. We have diseases, accidents, destructive storms, death, war, crime, drug addictions, drunkenness, abusive behaviors.

All these things remind us that things are not the way they're supposed to be. That nature, the creation, has been subjected to futility, and it's waiting for that day of liberation when indeed things will be as they were supposed to be.

Things will be fulfilling their very created purpose to honor and to glorify the maker of them all. So God is determined to put all things right on this earth, everything that he's made for himself and for the declaration of his praise.

[3:12] This vandalized earth is to shine once again with the untainted glory of God. When? When Jesus Christ returns. And this is what we've been studying and what we looked at last week.

That between this present age and the age to come is the return of Christ. And when he comes, he is going to not only raise the bodies of all men from their graves and bring all men to judgment, but he's also going to remake this creation and restore it to glory.

Now, last week we saw many of the biblical references, New Testament references to this. We've come then to the last reference on the front page of your outline, 2 Peter.

And I'm going to ask you to turn to this passage. We'll spend more time with it than we did the others. 2 Peter, chapter 3, and verses 1 and 2.

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

[4:33] The first thing we see is that Peter's not saying anything new. He's just reminding them of things that the prophets and the apostles have said. So, this teaching on the day of the Lord is not something new.

This is old stuff. I'm just putting you in remembrance of it. Verses 3 and 4 then. First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

They will say, where is this coming, he promised. Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. Isn't it interesting that there's a connection between those who scoff at the return of Jesus Christ and those who follow their own evil desires?

What is that connection? Why are those two found together, do you suppose? That those who follow their own evil desires are the ones who really don't take seriously the return of Jesus Christ. Is there any connection in your mind that immediately jumps up? Exactly. Because at the return of Christ, there is final judgment upon all men with their eternal destinies meted out.

[5:52] And so, I would like to think that this is not a moral universe and that I can just go and do what I want and never be held accountable. But this nagging teaching and this nagging promise about Jesus is coming back to judge the world in righteousness would spoil my fun.

And so, isn't it interesting that those who follow their own evil desires are the ones who scoff at the Lord's promise to return. And so, their argument is this.

He hasn't come, so he won't come. Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of the world. There's never been such a divine interruption into our universe.

It's the closed, what Francis Schaeffer called the closed universe. God is outside and he doesn't intrude. It's just the natural universe carrying out its natural laws.

And that's gone on from the very beginning. God has never intruded and interrupted history to judge. Now, what's wrong with that view of history?

[7:04] All right, exactly. The flood. It's ignorant, isn't it? It's a very ignorant view of history. And that is what Peter reminds us of in verses 5 and 6.

And we notice the deliberate nature of their forgetfulness here. Verse 5. But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. They deliberately forget. Again, we're seeing that they don't want to remember, do they?

They don't want to remember that God has interrupted man's history with divine judgments. And so they deliberately push that out. Paul talks about that, doesn't he?

That evil men, wicked and ungodly men, suppress the truth in ungodliness. They keep pushing it down. They don't want to deal with it. Here, these men deliberately forget that God has broken in with cataclysmic judgment.

[8:10] And the lesson that they don't want to know is that God does indeed judge men. This world is a moral universe under his control.

So that it's his word that is upholding the universe. It's his word that made the universe. It's his word that created the earth by the separation of the waters, the waters below and the waters above, so that there was dry ground.

And it's his word that used that same water that he used in bringing forth the earth to destroy and flood the earth in Noah's day.

And verse seven is the reminder that just as he did that in Noah's day with water, so he is going to destroy this present world with fire.

Verse seven, by the same word, the same word that created this earth and that called the waters to destroy the pre-Noah world. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

[9:26] Again, we're talking about the coming of the Lord and Peter saying that's the day of destruction. That's the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men.

You see the time reference then to all this. When is this going to happen? The day of judgment, which is the coming of Christ.

So this present earth is to be destroyed by fire and which will destroy ungodly men. But again, just as the righteous were spared from that first destruction by loading up in the ark.

So those who are in Jesus Christ, the righteous will be spared from this final judgment that's to fall upon the earth, the judgment of fire. Then in verses eight and nine, he says, but do not forget this one thing, dear friends.

You're talking about the Lord hasn't come. Where is the fulfillment of this promise? With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

[10:35] According to your timetable, you who live 80 years and you're gone. Yes, he's slow. But remember his perspective from eternity. He's not slow in keeping his promise.

He's right on time. And why is he waiting so long? The last half of verse nine, he's patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

He says that again later in verse 15. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote in his writings. The Lord is being patient that more and more might come to salvation and might flee into the ark of Christ and escape this destruction that's to happen when Christ returns.

But despite the delay. Verse 10 assures us. But the day of the Lord will come.

It will come. Though it delays and it will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar.

The elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

[11:46] So this day of the Lord will come. Now, notice how that the day of the Lord.

Is just is synonymous with the coming of the Lord. He hasn't changed subjects on us here. The whole question is, where's this promise of the Lord's coming?

We're talking about the coming of the Lord, the return of Christ. Christ. And here, Peter refers to it as the day of the Lord. He's waiting. He's tearing.

But the day of the Lord will come. So this is an important thing to recognize that the coming of the Lord in verse four is the same as the day of the Lord in verse.

10, because, again, the dispensational premillennialists would like to say that the coming of the Lord can be his rapture of the church. And then the day of the Lord happens later when he actually comes all the way down to earth.

[12:47] No, these two are the same as any plain reading of this passage would show. He's not starting up a different discussion of a different return.

And the coming of the Lord is to be as disastrous as someone who's unprepared for a burglar at night. As a thief in the night, so he will come to those who are not prepared.

And as a thief makes off with jewels and riches, so those who are unprepared will be left eternally poor by the coming of the Lord.

Now, this verse, verse 10, verse 7, and the verses that follow, 10 through 13, show us plainly that at Christ's coming, there will be cataclysmic changes for our universe, for the heavens and the earth.

We've seen that in verse 7, that the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire. We see it here in verse 10, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the earth and everything in it laid bare.

[13:57] We see it again at the last half of verse 12, that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we're looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So, great changes in store for this world. It is not the way it's supposed to be right now. And to get it into shape to where it is the way it's supposed to be, there will be great changes that need to take place.

A great judgment, a great purifying of fire will need to take place. But the result of this purification and the result of this fiery destruction will be a new heavens and a new earth.

We see that in verse 13, a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. This new heavens and new earth will be the home of the righteous alone.

It's the home of righteousness. Indeed, as Revelation 21, 27 says, Nothing unclean may enter in to the new Jerusalem, the city of God, that will have come down on this earth.

[15:11] This is the home of righteousness. Unrighteousness is no longer welcome. Right now, you have both, don't you, in this world. But in that day, this earth and the heavens, the new heavens and new earth will be the home of righteousness.

That means no more sin. No more wickedness. No more evil. No more curse. No more crying.

No more death. No more pain. And you begin to add to that then. No more what? No more keys. No more locks. A whole lot of things will be changed.

Because there's no more sin. No more curse. Every trace of sin. Every stain of the curse gone.

And that means there will be no unbelievers on this new earth either. The new world after Christ's coming is for the righteous alone, not to be shared with sinners.

[16:15] Indeed, as Isaiah speaks of it, there will be nothing to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain. Chapter 21 of Revelation and verse 3.

We're coming back here to Peter in a moment. But it says that God and his people will dwell together on this earth. I saw new heavens and a new earth. And for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the

dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. This earth is to be the home of God and his redeemed people. But only his redeemed people.

Indeed, the verses just preceding that reading in Revelation 21 tell us what has happened to anyone whose name was not found in the book of life. They were thrown into the lake of fire.

[17 : 22] They were thrown into hell. And that is the only place where wickedness and unbelief will be in all the created universe and all the created world and all the earth.

It will be without sin and wickedness. Only in a place of hell will wickedness be contained. But this earth, oh, it will be a place, a home of God and his people dwelling in righteousness.

Now, in our passage in 2 Peter 3, verse 7, we've seen that all the evil will be destroyed. When he comes, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The ungodly will be destroyed. They will not be able to enter into this new heavens and new earth. Isaiah 60 and verse 21 says, Then will all your people be righteous, and they will possess the land forever.

They are the shoots I have planted, the work of my hand for the display of my splendor. Remember Jesus' beatitude? Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Only the meek will inherit the earth.

[18 : 37] Not the proud self-righteous, only the meek. And then God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As Jesus has taught us to pray. Perfectly.

Without sin. That means that there are no sinners who refuse to do God's will. So this new earth will be a place where God's will is done.

Now, this is what Jesus taught us about his coming. This is what the apostles taught. That when Christ comes back, the wicked will be destroyed, and the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

That both of those things happen at the one return of Jesus Christ. It separates the righteous and the wicked for eternity. So we're back to the vandalism of this world.

Sin does not have the last word. Sin has made a mess of this world. But it doesn't have the last word. Christ does. And when he comes back, that will be seen. And what is the last word?

[19 : 43] A new heavens. A new earth. The home of righteousness. You know, there's a word, regeneration, that refers to the new birth.

It's used twice in our New Testaments. It's once it's used of people. But we are regenerated. We are made new creatures.

But there's another place in the New Testament where it's used of the earth. The cosmic regeneration. At the regeneration of all things. Matthew 19, 28. So this earth is to be regenerated.

This earth is to know a new birth. To become a new creation. Even as many of us have become new creations in Christ Jesus. Where are the new creations in Christ to live out their eternity?

Upon an earth that has been newly created. So the whole heavens and earth.

[20 : 42] The eternal home of righteousness. And you see how this fits the purpose for which God made the earth. The earth is to be the home where the righteous dwell.

God is righteous. And it was sin that caused separation between God and man. But in Jesus Christ, He has reconciled sinners to God.

And indeed, He's reconciling all things. And once all the sin has been gone from creation, the very creation once again will be a fitting dwelling place for God.

And that's the picture we have in Revelation 21. God coming down and dwelling with His people forever. Now there are practical applications that Peter doesn't want us to miss.

What's the so what of all this? Well, this is to inspire holy living. And I don't know of any place in the New Testament where Jesus or His apostles talk about the return of Jesus Christ, where holy living is not the application of the text.

[21 : 51] That's why it's there. It's not there to argue and haggle over when is Jesus coming back.

It's there to impress the urgency for believers not to get sucked into the sin that's going on all around them, but to remain faithful and true to the end, because it's only He who remains true to the end that will be saved.

And so these passages come as darts and as spurs to us to inspire holy living in believers and repentance and faith in unbelievers.

There is a clear link between what a man believes and how he behaves. Well, that's what we saw in the negative sense, didn't we, early on in this passage. Those who believe that Jesus isn't coming, how will they live?

Their evil desires, following their own evil desires. Those who believe that Jesus is coming back for judgment, how should they live? Well, that's the question that Peter asked.

Let's read it, verse 12 or verse 11. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

[23:10] Verse 14. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, a new heavens, a new earth, the home of righteousness, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him.

See to it that when He does come, you're ready to welcome Him. You're like those wise virgins who had oil in their lamps and they were ready to welcome Him when He came.

Watchfulness is holy living. That's what it means to be ready for this great day. The look of hope. The believer's hope.

This is our great hope that Christ will return. The great God and Savior is coming again for us. And the look of hope needs to inspire a life of holiness.

That's the spurs that Peter draws from it. And indeed, that's exactly how John argues in 1 John 3, 2 and 3.

[24:17] Brothers, we don't know what we will be, but when Christ returns, we will be like Him, for we'll see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. Everybody who's got a hope of Christ returning and remaking Him in His perfect image and remaking this world so that we might live in a world without sin, everybody who's got that hope purifies himself.

So we make every effort to be found spotless and blameless and at peace with Him. How does that happen? Only through Christ. You can't get one spot out with your own energy and efforts.

We come to Christ. We confess the sins that we commit and we plead His blood to cleanse us. And then we make every effort to live holy and ask God for strength to help us.

Such is the application that Peter draws. And I think that's healthy for us to remember that as we're studying this. This is not simply to get our eschatology straight.

It's to get our lives straight. And oh, this will be a dreadful day for unbelievers. As blessed as it will be for believers, so it will be dreadful for unbelievers.

[25:30] And that's what he says in verse 7. That's his application to the unbelievers. This present heavens and earth are reserved for fire being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

And when he comes, it will be as a thief that will find them unprepared to their great eternal loss. So that's the application. And I don't want us to miss that.

But I do want you to think now. What problems does 2 Peter chapter 3 present? This is a question that I've posed on your handout.

What problem does that present for premillennialists who hold to the belief that when Christ returns to this earth, before he changes it and makes it a completely new heavens and new earth, on this very earth as it is now, Christ is going to reign for a thousand years.

And during that thousand years, sin will be pressed down. The wicked will be ruled over by Christ and nations will be Christianized. And only at the end of that thousand years will a multitude as the sands of the sea come forth in rebellion against Christ.

[26:43] And then they'll be destroyed. And then the new heavens. What does this passage pose in the way of problems for the idea of a thousand year reign on this earth when Christ comes?

2 Peter leaves no place for a thousand years of Christ reign over this present old world with wicked people in it. Why no wicked people living here? What have we learned from 2 Peter?

They're destroyed at the coming of Christ. There's no wicked people to go on into this thousand year period, much less to continue and remain until the end of it and rebel against Christ's rule.

And also at the end and at the return of Christ, this old world is replaced by a newly perfected heavens and earth, which is the home of what?

Of righteousness. All right? So there won't be any unrighteous living on this earth when Christ comes back. Not for a thousand years, not for a billion years. It's to be the home of righteousness when Jesus comes back, because he'll make it such by purging it from sin and the curse.

[27:56] So, again, it's impossible to have sinners remaining for a thousand years on this earth when Christ comes back.

Now, there are certain objections that Sam Waldron answers in his book, End Times Made Simple. Objections to this teaching of the doctrine of a new heaven and a new earth.

The first question, doesn't the Bible teach the future annihilation of the present heavens and earth? There are passages that indeed speak of the heavens and the earth being destroyed.

This passage, 2 Peter, is probably the strongest language talking about destruction of this present world. And the whole idea in their mind is that this means the total annihilation of the present order and a completely new and different heavens and earth being created.

Is that not what the Bible is teaching? And we would say, no. We've seen in our study that the Bible last week, that the Bible in many places says that this earth is to be redeemed, bought back.

[29:06] It's to be renewed. It's to be restored. And all those passages argue against a total annihilation and trashing of this earth and starting over with an altogether new creation.

You say, but it is called a new creation that God is going to create a new. Yes, and so are you.

You're a new creation. If any man be in Christ, he is what?

He's a new creation. Well, aren't you the same you that was born? Well, yes and no.

There's similarities and there's differences. When you got saved, God didn't destroy you and say, I've got to remake you and I'm going to start all over.

There's trashing that. Now I'm going to make him over. So he's completely different. No, that's that's not right, is it? God redeems us.

[30:04] He restores us. He transforms us. He regenerates us. He gives us new birth. It that is the remaking of us in the sense that whereas once we had a heart that loved evil and hated the light and hated holiness, he so changes our hearts.

But it's still our heart. It's still me. It's still you. It's still the person that you are. And so we see that, yes, you're a new creation, but it's the same you. And that is a model for what God will do when he makes this earth a new creation.

Indeed, as I said, that word is used both of you and of the earth. So I don't believe that we're warranted in taking these verses to mean the absolute annihilation and discarding of the earth and then starting over with an altogether different earth.

That's not what what God will do with your bodies in the resurrection either. When your body is raised in glory, believer, it will be the self same body that you're living in now.

That's resurrection. And that's what happened to Christ. It was the same body that hung on the cross that was put in the tomb that came out. Now, it was different.

[31:17] It was glorified. New properties given to it. But it was the same body that died and was put into the grave. That's resurrection. To say that it was a different body would not be resurrection.

It would be, well, he created a new Jesus's body, but it's not the raising of his old body. And so with you and so with me and so with this earth. God means to redeem it, to restore it.

And then even within our passage, there's a strong argument given to us. What happened to the old world?

Pre-Noah. What does this passage tell us happened to that world? It was destroyed by water.

Okay. The Bible says it was destroyed by water. You see that in verse 6?

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. Was it annihilated?

[32:17] No. It just was covered with water for a while. And then appeared again when the waters receded. And yet that's called destruction.

And in the same way, this present world is to be destroyed by fire. Does that mean annihilation?

Not from the comparison of this very passage. It would rather mean purging. In the same way that you had such a wicked world.

And God says, I'm going to wipe the earth clean of mankind that I've made on it. Because their wickedness has risen up to me. And so he purged the world with his judgment of water.

So he's going to do at the end of the age. In judgment by fire, he will purge this earth of sin and of the curse. But again, it will not be annihilated and trashed.

To do so would be to admit to Satan, you won. You so defiled my creation and so vandalized it that there is nothing that I can do about it. I can't restore it.

[33:17] I've just got to scrap it and start all over. That's not victory. That's defeat. And Jesus will not have defeat. He will redeem the very earth that once rebelled against him.

And then there's any questions or further comments on that first objection with regard to the annihilation of the present heavens and earth. It is strong language that he uses here.

But if you remember that apocalyptic language and such statements are often used in the Old Testament to speak of the judging and the purging of the earth, I don't think we have to go to the end where we believe that this earth is going to be annihilated and discarded.

A second objection. Doesn't the new heavens and new earth refer to the millennial reign of Christ? For a long time, and still, many hold that any promises in your Bible that refer to a future glorious reign on the earth have to be understood as fitting into that thousand year millennial reign of Christ. Because they thought that at the end of the past. Because they thought that at the end of that time, true believers go to heaven. And heaven is the final existence. But if we understand, know that the new Jerusalem is to come down out of heaven to this earth.

[34 : 39] And this is to be part of the inheritance of the redeemed right here on this earth. Newly created. Then we should expect to find many passages in the Old Testament that refer to a future glorious kingdom on this present earth.

That is not referring to a thousand year segment of time, but rather is referring to the eternal age. Where we reign with Christ forever and ever. And indeed, that, I believe, is the better way to understand those passages.

And then, thirdly, doesn't the Bible teach us to look to heaven, not earth, as our final hope and final? Inheritance. Well, heaven right now is the happy abode of the disembodied spirits that have died in Christ.

They have gone into the presence of Christ. Heaven is their home. Heaven is the place that we're going to if our faith is in Christ. We are taught to look to heaven as our home. Our citizenship is in heaven.

Our riches are in heaven. Our best things are in heaven. But that does not undo the fact that when Christ returns, the new Jerusalem, the city of God, the people of God will come down from heaven to this earth.

[35 : 57] And God will dwell with them forever and ever in a new home where righteousness dwells. For now, our eyes are directed to heaven. That's where our treasure is.

That's where our Savior is. And from there, we expect him to come and bring all this to pass. But this inheritance is to be revealed and Christ is to return and is to come down and dwell on a new heavens and new earth with us.

Two practical conclusions by way of summing up. This doctrine enables us to better appreciate the life to come. Frankly, there are some descriptions of heaven that are given that I'm not sure I'd want to go there.

It's the disembodied spirits floating on little clouds, playing little harps. No, thank you. That's not heaven to me. And it's so disjointed and separated from life as I understand it that I have no appreciation for such a heaven.

The language of our Bible is far better when it describes heaven in the eternal state in terms that we are used to in life in this earth.

[37 : 18] Present life. Minus the curse. Minus sin. Minus sin.

Minus sin. And that enables us to better appreciate the life to come. And secondly, this doctrine enables us to properly exalt the work of Christ and give him the glory he deserves.

Every Christian rejoices in the work of Christ, but you only rejoice in it to the extent that you understand it. Isn't that true of the gospel? Every Christian rejoices in the gospel, but some Christians understand the gospel better than others and they're able to rejoice all the more in it. Well, defective views of what Jesus has done will diminish our ability to praise him and glorify him for what he's done. He's to be glorified for redeeming and renewing the same humanity and world that have been corrupted and polluted by sin.

This creation. This creation. This humanity is to know the final end for which it was created. And when we see that, what glory and praise will come to Jesus Christ?

[39 : 01] When we see that for all the vandalism that Satan and sin and the curse has wreaked in this universe. It will shine with the glory of God and the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea and how glory will come.

Who did this? Who undid the work of the vandal? And there will be the lamb. And how did he do it? He will appear as one having been slain. He did it by his cross, reconciling men, reconciling all

things to himself.

William Hendrickson tells a reading of a little boy who was coming home from school. He ran into the wrong house by mistake and quickly ran back out of the house.

Somebody who saw it asked him, why did you go in and then run out so quickly? He replied, I got into the wrong house. I thought it was ours, but ours is the house next door. And then the man asked him, but is not the house which you entered just as nice as your own?

Oh, yes, much finer, said the boy. Then why didn't you stay there? Because mother's not there, he said. And heaven will be.

[40:17] Heaven because Jesus is there. And for all that we've talked about, the new creation and the new heavens and new earth, let us not forget the joy of heaven is that Jesus will be here.

Forever dwelling with his people. Well, next week you can read Revelation 20. We've finally come to it. Any serious study of eschatology has to deal with Revelation 21 to 10.

The text for all millenarians, pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, they build their teachings on Revelation 21 to 10.

So if you'd read that passage, we'll come back to that next week and see what we're to make of this vision of John in Revelation 20.

We're dismissed. We're dismissed.