

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Heaven: What to Expect

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (2 Peter 3:11–13, KJV 1900)

Rather than boring in on the cosmic meltdown that he has described in this context, Peter shifts our primary focus onto a powerful and positive truth, one that should occupy our minds continually during our present pilgrimage. Scripture repeatedly and powerfully teaches the reality of the Second Coming and God's final judgment against the wicked, along with His securing every one of His beloved elect with Him in glory for eternity. (John 6:37-39; notice the reason for this security lies in what Jesus does and not what they do) If we focus too intently on the Second Coming alone, a logical question arises. What does this doctrine have to do with me and the life that I live today? And Peter directly addresses that question. In fact, many passages dealing with the Second Coming link that doctrine to our present life and its intended impact on how we live now. Study 1 Corinthians, Chapter 6. In one of the most concise studies of--and prohibitions against--sexual sin in the New Testament, in Verse 14, Paul introduces the resurrection of the body. Why? The point is powerful. If God intends to raise up this mortal body in which I live today, and take it into eternal joys with Him, shouldn't I use this body now to His glory and not for sinful indulgences?

And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. (1 Corinthians 6:14)

...Looking for and hasting unto... The more we keep the Lord's promised return prominent in our minds the less influence the trials of this life have on us. A doctor tells you that you have a terminal illness? What's new? You knew that already, and you long for His return to take you home. A friend whom you thought to be faithful disappoints you? It stings at the moment, but you trust in a faithful friend who "...sticketh closer than a brother." A financial implosion in the economy ravages your retirement. Problem? Of course, but your Father has promised to stand faithfully by you through all of life's trials. You may have to go to the proverbial "Plan B," but He will not forsake you. God's faithfulness to His promise is not contingent on our health, friendships, or financial security.

Human words and thought cannot grasp the full reality of heaven. However, Scripture occasionally gives us a faint glimpse of that glory to encourage us in our pilgrimage. I have occasionally heard naive, well-meaning believers quote Paul's words, "*Eye hath not seen...*" (1 Corinthians 2:9) and apply the words to heaven. They fail to read the context of this verse. Great error often occurs by people ignoring the context of Bible verses instead of allowing context to interpret every verse. In the very next verse, Paul writes, "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*" If Paul was writing about heaven in this passage, you have a colossal contradiction. In one verse, you know nothing, and in the very next verse, God reveals that truth to you. Contextually, in this passage, Paul is teaching us that the unregenerate human mind has no knowledge of the things of God. It cannot fathom or comprehend them; impossible. However, in the new birth, God does reveal these same things to His children by the quickening and indwelling Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, we, according to his promise... As in Verse 9, here Peter again uses the singular word, "promise," not "promises." He continues to focus his teaching on that singular promise of the Second Coming. Peter relies on the Lord's faithful promise of His return and glory, whether that day comes tomorrow or a thousand years in the future.

...new heavens and a new earth. Some aberrant groups use this verse to suggest that God will recreate an ideal universe from the old universe that He just melted down. At one time, I believed this point, though not in any way colored by the carnal corruptions of at least two groups that hold to this view.

1. When Jesus refuted the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, He did so by telling them that, in the resurrection, "*...they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.*" (Matthew 22:30) Thus, the whole notion that the elite of present believers shall become a god over their own world in eternity where they marry their celestial wives and produce children to inhabit their

world collapses in the wilting light of Jesus' words in this passage.

2. The second errant view holds that 144,000, the most elite, faithful of all time will inhabit heaven, and other lesser believers will inhabit an ideal world unstained by sin, also fails in light of our present passage. The idea of elitism and ruling over other people has characterized Satan's devices from Genesis, Chapter 3, when the serpent used it to beguile Adam and Eve, "...ye shall be as gods...." (Genesis 3:5) This idea wholly contradicts Scripture's description of life in heaven after the resurrection where "...God is all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:28)

Both of these views wholly miss the "...God is all in all" point that Paul makes in the passage cited. Both, along with many lesser errant ideas about heaven, focus on the individual who in some way supposedly earns his place there and by that merit receives his reward for what he did to earn his "heaven." God being all in all reminds us that heaven is far more about Him than about us.

My former thoughts regarding this passage considered that God would use the created material that He melted down to recreate this universe in its ideal form before sin corrupted it, but God would be "all in all" in that world. Why did I change my view of the passage--and of that day? I overlooked one simple truth that Peter inserts prominently in the passage. "...wherein dwelleth righteousness." Notice that Peter used the present tense verb, "dwelleth." What we look for in heaven after the Second Coming and the resurrection of our bodies exists right now! And right now, righteousness dwells there. Consider a few simple, but convincing points from Scripture.

1. Scripture tells us that Enoch "...was translated that he should not see death." (Hebrews 11:5) "...he was not, for God took him." (Genesis 5:24) It is generally believed that God took Enoch, body, included, into heaven. Where has Enoch's body been for these long centuries since his translation?
2. Based on the dispute between Michael and Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9), a number of commentaries suggest that, after Moses died and God buried his body in a secret place, He later raised Moses' body. The fact that Moses and Elijah (Our next example) appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration at least makes this view possible.
3. Elijah was taken, body, soul, and spirit, by the chariot of God into heaven. (2 Kings 2:11) Where has Elijah's body been since he was taken up into heaven?
4. And our "Magnum Opus." Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to the

disciples and taught them for forty days before His ascension, His bodily ascension back into heaven (Acts 1:9), where He now sits with His Father on His throne. (Revelation 3:21) Where did Jesus' body go at His ascension?

We could ignore the Old Testament examples, and the fact would remain in Jesus' bodily resurrection and ascension. All of these examples, Jesus' own resurrection and ascension at the preeminent head, urge one conclusion. There is a literal place right now that Scripture refers to as heaven where Jesus' resurrected body, and perhaps those Old Testament examples, as well, literally resides. It is a literal place, but it stands apart from the material world in which we now live. God tells us elsewhere in Scripture that this present material world shall grow old, wear out, and God shall fold it up and discard it, as a worn out garment. (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12) Peter's description of the cosmic meltdown simply gives us more details about that event. And, while Peter describes the utter meltdown of the present material world in which we live, he also tells us that the place that we long to see and live in for eternity exists right now. And, right now, while we struggle in a broken, sin-cursed world where sin often seems to rule far more than righteousness, God has reserved a very literal place "...wherein dwelleth righteousness." Peter further encourages us that we shall finally be taken to that place and become active participants in that righteous glory with our Savior.

If this truth sinks into our minds in the here and now, it transforms our lives. Instead of focusing on the mundane things that rob us of our joy, we hold tightly to our hope of that glory to come. We look for it. We expect it. We long for it. And, praise be to our loving, merciful, gracious Savior, in the end, we shall surely be taken to that place to fully rejoice in our God and to praise Him for eternity. What activities shall occupy our time there? We only know from Scripture that whatever we do there will praise Him with the perfect praise that escaped us while we lived in the present broken world. Considering Scripture's limited description of our God, and Scripture's testimony that He shall "...be all in all," while we may not know the details of eternity's activities, we shall surely not be disappointed, much less ever become bored by those activities!

Thank you, Lord, for our present glimpse of that glorious place, but, thank you above all for the knowledge that we shall be with You to give You the perfect praise that we could not give You here.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor