

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What Does Scripture Tell us About Heaven?

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

In our present study of this passage and its context, I seek to bridge the gap between folks who add far too much of their imagination to Scripture and think they know almost everything about heaven and those folks who ignore what Scripture does teach about heaven and say that we can know nothing at all about it now. Both extreme ideas miss the Biblical mark. If Scripture revealed nothing at all about heaven, we'd have no basis for our hope of glory with the Lord. And if it said everything there is to know, we'd have no need for faith to anticipate that day.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. No question, the Lord presently dwells with His people and is honored by many of them as their God. However, Scripture affirms that not all children of God, all with whom the Lord dwells, honor Him rightly as their God in the here and now. Peter reminds us of the sad reality of this question.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:9)

Consider carefully what this verse says. Peter just completed an admonition to his readers to make their faith fruitful and God-centered by adding seven virtues to that faith. He wrote an admonition. He in no way suggests that, "If you are really a child of God, God will see to it that you add these things to your faith." He admonished his readers to do so, and he warns his readers of their loss should they neglect or refuse to add those things to their faith. Peter in no way advocates a divine intervention that guarantees that every born again child of grace shall perform these works.

In the verse, Peter takes his warning to its obvious conclusion. We might read the admonition and ask, "What about those who do not add these things to their faith?" And Peter answers the question. He doesn't in any way suggest that anyone who fails to add these things may not be born again. He rather describes the pathetic plight

of a born again child of grace who fails to live up to his admonition.

1. **Blind.** Peter does not describe a person dead in trespasses and sins, but a living child of grace who has lost his vision. He is alive, but he can no longer see things that should be most central and important to his spiritual vision.
2. **Cannot see afar off.** Apparently this person can see up close in his immediate setting, but he has lost sight of the "Big picture." He may well see things that relate to his present situation. In fact, a person in this state may well obsess over "What about me?" But how much does he see and think regarding "But we see Jesus..."? He suffers from an advanced case of self-imposed spiritual blindness.
3. **Hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.** This point is the key point—and identifies the greatest loss—of Peter's warning. Contrary to the dominant man-centered thinking of the populist preaching of our day, Peter does not write that this person was not really purged from his old sins. Quite the opposite, Peter affirms that he was in fact purged from his old sins. Peter's point deals with this person's memory and awareness. He has forgotten the most important fact of his spiritual existence. He was purged, but he no longer believes it! No wonder Peter wrote such a stern warning to his first readers—and to us. Do not allow yourself to neglect the adding of those graces to your faith lest you become like this person.

New Testament Scripture presents us with a clear tension point that we must resolve. At times in Scripture's admonitions to the godly life of faith, Scripture refers to a very small number of believers. In other Scriptures that deal, for example, with heaven (Such as Revelation 5:9-14), passages describe a very large number. I suggest that the most obvious and right resolution of this tension is far simpler than many would-be theologians try to make it. The number of saved, eternally and finally

so, those whom the Lord has redeemed by His own life, is quite large compared to the whole of humanity. **No, it is not universal.** Scripture never teaches that every person shall eventually be saved in eternal glory. But the number, as weighed against the whole of humanity, is a large number. In vivid contrast, Scripture consistently describes the number of those who come to faith and to the godly walk of faith in this life is a small number. After Jesus Himself preached for over three years, although He healed and blessed countless numbers, only a hundred twenty believers were faithfully waiting for Him in Jerusalem. (Acts 1:14-15) From a meager hundred twenty people, on the day of Pentecost, the Lord grew that number by three thousand in one day. (Acts 2:41) As impressive as three thousand people converted in one day seems to us, even that number was quite small compared to the number of Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost holy day.

Our study passage describes a different situation, far more glorious. It describes a complete harmony between the Lord and those with whom He dwells on this occasion. There is no disjoint between the saved and those who stand with Him as His people.

As I ponder this passage and think of its implications for heaven, I'm reminded of the words of an old hymn, "Where Jesus is will be heaven for me." And John emphasizes that the Lord pervades this place; that He will dwell with His people there, they shall be His people, and He shall be their God, and dwell with them. Ah, that, my friends, is a great description of heaven!

John delves deeper into the rich details of that world of glory.

1. **And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.** Those drops of water in our eyes are not the real problem. The real problem is the heartache that produces them. And John's point, I believe, directly addresses this issue. He shall remove all reasons for grieving, painful tears. They shall not exist in that world of glory. The point is even richer. Have you ever been heartbroken about something and felt the stinging pain to the marrow of your soul? Most of us have lived through such painful moments. But have you also in the midst of that moment found a loving and faithful friend who held you, comforted you, and spoke words of kind wisdom that seemed to sweep the clouds and the pain away and give you hope? What an incredible joy! We are getting closer to heaven's joy, are we not?
2. **...and there shall be no more death.** Death stands near the top as one of life's most ever-present sources of pain. Again, hymns reach into the soul and touch the comforts of this truth. "If you have friends in Gloryland who left because of pain, there'll be no pain in Gloryland. They'll suffer not again."

3. **...neither sorrow.** It matters not what causes your pain or mine. We all face those occasional seasons of sorrow and the pain that always accompanies sorrow of heart. Forget all those things. The Lord shall not allow sorrow to enter than pure world of joyful glory.
4. **...nor crying.** There is such a thing as tears of joy, but most crying is not from the wellspring of joy. It more often originates at the fountain spring of stinging loss of some kind. Ah, no crying in heaven.
5. **...neither shall there be any more pain.** For most of my life I have been blessed to enjoy a relatively pain-free existence. I had very few moments that an aspirin or an Aleve pill wouldn't calm down. About ten years ago that all changed. A quiet lingering low back pain started to grow and tear at my body. I have learned the reality of pain, occasionally a stubborn lingering pain that goes on day and night. Prior to this experience, I had little appreciation for this part of John's description, but today I cherish it dearly. No hint of pain ever? Wow! Hallelujah! I'm ready for that experience. And while I think of my physical pain I feel deeply for dear souls who have little body pain, but who live with the stinging pains of broken hearts and disappointed dreams brought on by unfaithful friends or an unfaithful spouse. God bless those hurting souls and give them His sweet reminders that heaven shall know no such pains or disappointments, no pain of any kind whatever.
6. **...for the former things are passed away.** John doesn't pretend to cover every single source or manifestation of the broken twistedness of this world. In case you experience pain or disappointment or tears from some other source, when you arrive in glory, you shall rest and rejoice. That "former thing" belongs to the world that you left, but it has no place in that new world of glory where you shall spend eternity with the Lord.

Occasionally believers who view this passage as descriptive of the abundance of the Lord's blessings on the faithful believer in the here and now will try to fit these descriptions into this life. My observation is simple. All told, these descriptions simply say more than we can reasonably apply to this life, even in the life experience of the most faithful of believers. I doubt that any believer of our time would think himself or herself to be remotely equal to Paul or John. Even in his faithfulness, consider the ordeals that Paul faced specifically because of his unwavering faithfulness to his Lord. (Acts 20:22-24; notice Paul's words; the Holy Ghost communicated to Paul that bonds and afflictions waited for him in Jerusalem and in the other cities that he would visit, not because he was weak in his faith or faltered, but because he was faithful. 2 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor