Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

One of the types of books that you can often find on the bestseller shelf at the local Christian bookstore is a book that describes a person’s journey to heaven. And there are many of these. The author claims to have died and gone to heaven and then come back to life, and they describe what heaven is like. Well, if someone ever recommends that you read a book like this, my suggestion is: Don’t bother. For in 2 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul speaks about a time that he was caught up to heaven. He says, “*[I] heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter*.” So, if the Apostle Paul was not allowed to describe what he saw in heaven, then we can be pretty sure that what some 8 year old boy or 37 year old woman wants to share with us has more to do with imagination or hallucination or making money or than the truth.

But it is legitimate to wonder what heaven is like. And we are going to do that in connection with the verse in front of us today. A major theme of Peter’s letter is responding to the teaching of some in his day that Jesus was not going to return to earth and there would be no day of Judgment. And Peter provides many reasons to believe that Jesus will return and that there will be a Day of Judgment. And as he draws to a close, he calls on believers to wait “*for the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*.” And we want to examine these words in the context of Peter’s letter, but with other Scriptures also, to see **why believers should yearn for heaven with anticipation and excitement**. And our four points will be, **When** will the new heavens and new earth come? **How** will the new heavens and new earth come about? **What** will the new heavens and new earth be like? And finally, **what does waiting for the new heavens and new earth look like?**

1. So, first of all, **WHEN will the new heavens and new earth come?**
   1. Back in chapter 1:16, Peter spoke about “*the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” And chapter 3:7 speaks of “*the day of judgment*” and verse 10 speaks of “*the day of the Lord*” and verse 12 speaks of, “*The coming day of God*.” And this sort of language is used throughout Scripture in reference to the Second Coming of Jesus. It is on that day that He will return, that the general resurrection of the dead will occur, that the great Judgment of all humanity will take place, and that He will bring in the new heavens and new earth, where He will live, forever, with His redeemed people.
      1. And we read about this in **Revelation 20-21**. We are told about the return of Jesus, the day of Judgment, and a “*new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away*.”
      2. Now, in the **Old Testament**, there are many prophecies about the coming Day of the Lord. And they were given to the people of Israel before they went into exile, and when they were in exile. And the prophecies were meant by way of encouragement. And when you read them, you can forgive them for thinking that they were going to come out of exile, return to Jerusalem, the temple would be rebuilt, Messiah would come, and that would be it – the Day of the Lord – new heavens and new earth, like we read earlier in Isaiah 65! They read like one, fantastic event. But of course, we have the benefit of the New Testament. We understand that these prophecies were what are called **multiple fulfilment prophecy** – more than one fulfilment.
         1. It’s kind of like when you drive toward a mountain range and from far off it looks like you have to go up the side of the mountain and then down the other side. But when you get there, there are lots of ups and down as you slowly make you way across the mountain. And that’s how it is with Old Testament prophecy. It sounded like one, massive event, but it turned out that they were restored from exile, and later, the temple was rebuilt, and later, Jesus came, the first time, and He will come again at the end of time. And it is then that He will bring in the new heavens and new earth.
2. So, that’s the **when** of the new heavens and new earth – when Jesus returns. But secondly, **How** will the new heavens and new earth come about?
   1. And the simple answer is by a **burning**. By way of precedent, Peter speaks in verse 6 about the global flood of Noah’s day. Back then it was water that the Lord used to purify the world through the destruction of the wicked and the deliverance of Noah and his family. But Peter continues in verse 7: “*But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly*.” So, when Jesus returns it will be fire that brings about the new heavens and new earth. And we see more about this in **verse 10**. There Peter says, “*The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed*.” **Verse 11** speak also of everything being “*dissolved*,” and **verse 12** says, “*The heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn*!” So, the whole universe, including the planets and stars, as well as this earth, will be purified or refined or renewed by fire.
      1. Now, something is being described here that is virtually impossible for us to understand. Perhaps a helpful illustration is **precious metals**. You see, to get pure gold or pure silver, you put it in fire and you heat it up. And the heat burns away all of the rubbish and not-gold metals in the gold, so that, at the end of the burning, all you have is pure gold.
      2. But with the heavens and earth, it is sin and all its consequences that needs to be removed. And the way that this is accomplished is described in the Bible as by a great burning.
3. But that brings us, thirdly, to what is probably the biggest question for us all, which is: **What** will the new heavens and new earth be like?
   1. Well, we could easily take a whole series of sermons to explore this, because heaven is something that believers should meditate on, regularly! But we only have a few minutes to do this today. And the first concept to help us understand the new heavens and new earth is **home**. And that is because heaven is the believer’s true home. We have talked, many times, about how the Father’s plan of salvation is to present the Son with a redeemed people at the end of time, that He may live with them and enjoy them, and they Him, forever. So, heaven is the believer’s true home. That is where we belong. That is what we were created for and chosen for. This life down here on earth is preparation for the life up there.
      1. Have you ever been on a journey and really **looked forward to getting home**? Your own bed. Your own space. The smells, the feels, the familiarity, the comforts? And perhaps you can even remember a time when you were younger, and you got **homesick**. Yes? You missed home so much that you got upset and even physically ill. And there are also **refugees**, people who have been forced to leave their home country, maybe because of war or politics. And the longing or yearning to be able to go home can be incredibly powerful.
      2. Well, the Bible often refers to believers as sojourners or pilgrims or exiles, because this life is not our true home; heaven is our true home. And we should long to be home in heaven!
   2. Now, I know what you are thinking: **Pastor,** **that’s nice, but** **what is heaven actually like**. Right? And perhaps I can ask that question in a way that many Christians are afraid to ask it: Our Lord’s Day described life everlasting as “a blessedness in which to praise God eternally.” So, we wonder, will heaven really be just clouds and harps? Because, if we are being honest, that doesn’t sound all that wonderful, does it! Well, I want to say here that I have been really helped in preparing this sermon by two books about heaven. And I will be quoting from them quite a bit, and I am happy to give you the titles later.
      1. We have already seen that the great burning when Christ returns will purify or refine or renew the heaven and the earth. And I can’t tell you exactly what it will look like and be like, but the Bible gives us enough information to know that the new heavens and new earth will look similar to what we see now but much better!
         1. **One of the Beatitudes is about** **the meek**. I am sure you know it. How does it go? “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit (*what?) *the earth*.”
         2. **Revelation 5:9-10** says of Christ, “*By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth*.” So, heaven will not be an ‘up there on the clouds’ existence, but a wonderful ‘on the earth’ existence.
         3. It is true that right now, when believers die, their soul goes immediately to be with the Lord in heaven, up there, somewhere. But when Jesus returns and brings the new heavens and new earth, we will live with Him on the new earth. One author said, “Christ will renew the world to make it a fitting dwelling place for His renewed people.”
            1. When we visit friends who have had their house **renovated** and upgraded, assuming they have done a nice job, we typically say something like, “Wow! I love what you've done with this place!” And with the greatest of respect, that will surely be our reaction in the new heavens and new earth, Lord, I love what you have done with the place!
         4. And continuing his efforts to paint a biblical and helpful picture of what heaven is like, the author went on to say, “We will live rich, full, fulfilling, human lives on the solid ground of a new earth, clothed in new bodies, joined in blessed society.”
            1. And first and foremost, this society will be a blessed society because we **will be with Jesus**!

I once visiting a man whose wife had just died after a long battle with cancer. And we were talking about heaven, and I commented that one day he would see her again in heaven. And his response, which in no way was meant to deny the beautiful reality of being reunited with his wife, was that his greatest joy would be being with Jesus. And he was absolutely right.

The Bible describes the church as the bride and Jesus as the bridegroom. And can you imagine a bride arriving at her wedding and when the doors to the church opened, she ran to the greet the wedding guests or her bridesmaids. That would be most odd, right. She should have eyes, first and foremost, for her groom!

And as we think about heaven, that is how it should be with us – I will see Jesus!

* + - * 1. But we can also look forward to **being with believing loved ones and other believers**.

Have you ever experienced a happy reunion with someone you have not seen for a long time? It is a wonderful thing! Well, one author said, We will enjoy a “reunion with believers from ages past, those who lived and died in time so far removed from our own, perhaps those whose books you read or whose hymns you sang, or whose examples you followed.” Isn’t that beautiful to contemplate?

In our services we take up a collection. And sometimes we have a special collection for a special mission or diaconal need. So, you put your money in the bag, and you assume that it finds its way to whomever in support of gospel radio or Bible translation or emergency relief, etc. Well, I remember someone once speculating, and I think helpfully, that in heaven, we will meet the recipients of these funds and know that we had this blessed gospel connection.

* + - 1. And I would love to read you the whole section from one of the books about heaven, but the author describes things like artistic endeavour, architecture, athletic skill, music, science, gardening, eating, and even travel as things that we might still enjoy on the new earth. But we will do so with those things having been rid of the corrupting and distorting influences of sin, and with our imperishable, glorious, and powerful resurrected bodies. Isn’t that amazing to contemplate!?
      2. Now, this author freely admits that **the Bible does not give us all this in definite detail**. There is some speculation here. But he did this to illustrate that “the new world will be more, and not less, than life as we know it now.” We don’t want to reduce heaven to better art and gardening and eating, “but,” he said, “there is nothing wrong – indeed, there is something quite fruitful – about imagining just how abundant our life with God in God’s new world will be and making use of the familiar in order to do so.”
      3. The other author describes it this way: “The most ordinary moment on the new Earth will be greater than the most perfect moments in this life … (Think of) life on the new earth ... [as] like sitting in front of the fire with family and friends, basking in the warmth, laughing uproariously, dreaming of the adventures to come – and then going out and living those adventures together. With no fear that life will ever end or that tragedy will descend like a dark cloud. With no fear that dreams will be shattered or relationships broken.”
  1. Are these images helping you to get a sense of what the Lord has in store for you in your true home? I hope they are, because when we think about heaven there should be excitement and anticipation!

1. But there should be more than just excitement and anticipation, as we see in our fourth point. For our text says that believers are “waiting for” the new heavens and new earth. So, **what does this waiting look like**?
   1. Well, **the end of verse 13** tells us that the new heavens and new earth is a place “*in which righteousness dwells*.” **Revelation 22:3** describes the new heavens and new earth this way: “*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship Him*.” And later in the same chapter we read, “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood*.” And so, as those who are waiting for this place where there is only righteousness or holiness or goodness, it comes as no surprise that Peter describes the life that we should be striving to live now as “*lives of holiness and godliness*” in verse 11. In other words, we should be practicing for or preparing for the life we are going to be living in the new heavens and new earth.
      1. And it doesn’t really come out in English, but the words holiness and godliness are written in Greek in the **plural**. So, literally, Peter is saying, “It is necessary for you to live in holinesses and godlinesses.”
         1. Back in chapter 1, we were exhorted to “*make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue* *… [and] knowledge … [and] self-control … [and] steadfastness … [and] godliness … [and] brotherly affection … [and] love*.” These are the sorts of holinesses and godlinesses that we must busy ourselves with.
         2. In chapter 1:8, Peter said, “*If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful*.” But on the positive side, he described them also as how we confirm our calling and election. When we see these sorts of characteristics growing in our lives, it is evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom God only gives to His elect. It is evidence that he is making us more and more like Jesus! So, we have every reason to make every effort to grow in these behaviours and attitudes.
      2. But I also want to draw your attention to one word in verse 12. We read there that we are to be “waiting for and ***hastening*** *the coming day of the Lord*.” Hastening means ‘to hurry’ or ‘to speed up.’ I am sure you boys and girls can remember a time when Mum or Dad announced that you were going to go to the park when the lounge and bedrooms were tidy. And the tidying went very slowly at first, until Dad said, “The sooner you get all this tidied up, the sooner we will go!” And then everyone got really busy! And this was Dad trying to hasten the time of departure, to bring it about sooner than might otherwise have been the case. Well, what we see in verse 12 is that pursuing holinesses and godlinesses hastens the coming of the Lord. Isn’t that striking?!
         1. If you love the Lord Jesus and desire to show your thankfulness to Him for your salvation, then every time you pray, “*Your kingdom come*,” and every act of devotion to Him, and every time you resist temptation, and every choice you make to do what pleases your Father in heaven, you hasten or speed u[p the day of Christ’s return! Isn’t that incredible!
         2. Now, I know what you Calvinists are thinking :-) But isn’t God sovereign? Doesn’t everything happen according to His plan? And doesn’t **Acts 17:31** say that God “*has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness*”? Yes. All this is true.
         3. But we cannot let that cancel out the call to ***pursue*** holinesses and godlinesses, and the teaching that *this speeds up* the coming of the day of the Lord. This is one of those wonderful mysteries or tensions that we simply must affirm and celebrate. But the emphasis here is on how Christian living hastens the return of Christ and the new heavens and new earth!

Well, I hope that this sermon has given you a better understanding of what awaits believers in the new heavens and new earth. And I must be very clear here that not everyone will enjoy the new heavens and new earth. I have spoken about the great burning fire that will bring about the wonderful new heavens and new earth, but there will be another burning fire on the day of the Lord – the never-ending, agonizing, punishing fire of hell. It will not purify, and it will never go out. And it is where all those who refuse to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord will spend all eternity. And if you have not yet done this, please do it today. Because none of us knows when we will die or when Jesus will return. Do not put Him off!

But as we draw to a close, it is hard to comprehend life in the new heavens and new earth, isn’t it. And, if we are being honest, while there is misery in this life, there is also much beauty and joy and happiness. It is why death is so awful to contemplate, and why we cling to life. But brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, we ought to yearn for eternal life with Christ and with all His people. And to help you with this, I want to share with you a very beautiful illustration that one author provided.

He said, Imagine being taken to a party by a friend. You see a few people that you recognize, and there are a few good conversations and laughs and some finger food, but it never really seems to ‘get started.’ And many of those who you thought might be there, your best friends and family members, do not turn up. Well, after an hour of this, your friend says, ‘Come one. Let’s get go,’ and you leave, with a sense of disappointment. And soon enough, you arrive home and are dropped at the kerb, and you walk up the path and open the door, and you hear, “Surprise!” And all your best friends and your whole family is there, including some who you haven’t seen for ages. All your favourite foods are on the table and there is the smell of BBQ in the air. And then, sometime later, the friend who dropped you off, and the friends who were at the first party arrive, also. And it turns out to be the real party; the one that was planned all along.And if you had stayed at that first party, you would have missed this one!

So, brothers and sisters, when you or your loved one gets the terminal illness diagnosis, or as you grow old, remember that **this life is not the real party**. The real party is in our heavenly home. As the author of the book put it: “To be in resurrected bodies, on a resurrected earth, in resurrected friendships, enjoying a resurrected culture with the resurrected Jesus – now that will be the ultimate party.”

So, we end with this prayer from Revelation 22:21, “*He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*.”