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Heaven, A Restored Place

In 538 B.C. God used a pagan king Cyrus, the ruler of Persia, in a most extra-ordinary way. In fact many years before his birth, in the book of Isaiah, God even mentioned him by name.

Isaiah 44:28, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'"

God spoke these words 140 years before Cyrus was born! Regardless, the day did in fact arrive when God prompted this secular king to issue a decree which allowed the dispersed people of God to return to Jerusalem where they eventually would rebuild the temple. Now, the first thing they did in their effort to rebuild was to erect the altar of burnt offering and so re-establish the sacrificial system. With this completed, they went to work laying the foundations of the temple. It took some time, but when the people of God were finished, there was great celebration! Yet, somewhat surprisingly to

the younger Israelites I'm sure, the laying of the foundation of the temple and its courts evoked tears amongst the aged.

Ezra 3:12, "Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes..."

Why the tears? Because these older men remembered the former glory of the temple; they could recall what it was like, and it moved them quite deeply!

The Scripture gives us a glimpse of heaven so that we can look forward in anticipation to the glory that awaits us in Christ. It's easy to forget that, at one time, life on this earth was a paradise. There was no sin, misery, suffering, or conflict. Man enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. But on account of our rebellion, the earth and everything in it was "subjected to futility" (Romans 8:18-25), now that is the bad news. The good news is that someday heaven once again will reside on earth, the end will be as the beginning! And thus not only will it be a continuation of our life on this earth, a holy place, perfect place and a permanent place but as we shall see, heaven will be a restored place!

Acts 3 rests in redemptive history at a very important place.

- Christ has ascended into glory, Acts 1:1-11.
- Another disciple has been chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, Acts 1:12-26.
- Pentecost has come and gone in which the Jewish celebration of First Fruits was accompanied by the ingathering of the first fruits of the Messianic Kingdom, Acts 2.

The body of Christ was in its formative stages, and the question we naturally ask are these:

- Would the disciples continue with the work of Christ?
- Would they truly do "greater works" than their Savior, John 14:12?
- Would the ministry of God's Kingdom fizzle?

Acts 3 answers these questions. Here we read of Peter and John going into the temple. As they approach the temple gate, they see something that they had seen hundreds of times before, a lame man on a pallet begging for money (Acts 3:1-4). But this time, it was different. Peter and John no longer were primarily a "ministry of Christ" though God would continue His work in both of their lives. Rather, through the commissioning of their Lord, these two men had become ministers of Christ. And so, rather than walking by the man in the hope that they wouldn't be seen, Peter said this:

Acts 3:6-8, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene- walk!' And seizing him by the right hand, [Peter] raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God."

The stir that this created caused the crowds to conclude that Peter and John were more than just

men and as such ought to be praised and lauded (e.g., Acts 3:11-12). In response, Peter began preaching to the crowds (Acts 3:11-26) about the kingdom of God coming in the person and work of Christ. He continued by stating that the healing that had just occurred was by the power and glory of Christ, and not man!

Acts 3:18-21, “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”

The phrase that is important for our study is found in verse 21, “Whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things...” Throughout Scripture the “period of restoration” refers to the future reign of Christ/Messiah when God’s Kingdom is fully restored to this earth. Recall that when God created this world, He established His kingdom on the earth!¹ The devil, having been cast out of heaven, endeavored to attack this Kingdom by corrupting God’s co-regents, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7). Sadly he was successful! Heeding the counsel of Satan, Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Yet they did not become a sovereign entity as promised by the devil. Rather, they became enslaved to Satan, and the world became his domain (cf. Luke 4:5-7).

Yet God was unwilling not only to give up this world, but also to lose His people. He took upon Himself flesh and blood, destroyed the works of the devil (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14), and so established His Kingdom in part on this earth (cf. John 18:36).

Today, the Kingdom of God exists on this earth in the hearts of men (Luke 17:21)! Yet someday we know that it is going to come in its fullness and “the kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15)! Until then our hope/anticipation as Christians is the Second Coming of Christ which is “the period of the restoration,” that time when Christ reclaims the world! Christ referenced this time:

Matthew 19:28, “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.”

The disciples later asked Christ:

Acts 1:6, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

Truly, the time is coming when God will restore everything that was lost through the fall! That is what Peter referenced in Acts 3. This is what heaven is all about!

- The Kingdom of God will come to this earth in its fullness.
- God will reign with His people on this earth.
- We shall behold God face to face.
- Death shall be swallowed up in victory.

- That which is in part shall be in full.

This is what should come to our minds when we hear: “the period of restoration of all things.” From this we conclude that heaven is a restored place! This means that there was a place from which mankind and this earth fell. This restoration will have to do with God’s regency upon the earth.

Revelation 21:1-3, “And 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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.’”

As glorious as this passage is, it is not the first time we read of God “dwelling with His people.” Before the fall (cf. Genesis 3:8) God dwelt on this earth. He walked among His people. His reign and rule were fully established such that this earth was His domain. And yet with the fall, God gave up His right to reign on (not “over”) the earth. Heaven will be that that time when God’s throne once again is on the earth. In fact, when God speaks of the Last Day and the judgment that awaits the earth, He speaks of it in terms of the execution of a Last Will and Testament.

Revelation 5:1-5, “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’ And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’”

The “scroll” in this passage had seven seals. That means that a little bit would be written on a parchment, then it would be rolled and then sealed. Then a little more would be written on the parchment, and it too would be rolled and then sealed. This would continue until the scroll was bound by seven seals. The significance of this sealed document is that in Christ’s day this took the form of a Last Will and Testament. The Book of Revelation is the revelation of God’s will wherein the earth is deeded over to the ONE worthy to open the book: Jesus Christ! At that time, “the Kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ!” (Revelation 11:15)

Now this truth ought radically to alter the way we view this land. Jeremiah helps us do that:

Jeremiah 32:7-9, “Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle is coming to you, saying, ‘Buy for yourself my field which is at Anathoth, for you have the right of redemption to buy it.’” Then Hanamel my uncle’s son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the Lord, and said to me, ‘Buy my field, please, that is at Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours; buy *it* for yourself.’ Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanamel my uncle’s son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver.”

The significance of this exchange is seen when you understand that at that moment in time, the Babylonian forces occupied the field AND Jeremiah knew that this was the beginning of the end of Judah. According to his own prophecy, Judah in fact would be brought into exile for seventy years and that he would never live to possess the land physically. So why did he buy it? Because God told him that in seventy years, the nation would be restored and the land would once again be in the possession of Jeremiah's family!

God called Jeremiah to live on this earth, at a time of great upheaval, turmoil, uncertainty, and wickedness, in light of tomorrow! He was to tend the garden, so to speak, even though its future was one of doom and gloom!

This is our calling today. This is our Father's world (Psalm 24:1-2). And though at present it lies in the hands of the enemy, someday it will be the sole possession of God and His people! And while it may appear to be "a re-arranging of the chairs on the titanic" it is in fact an act of great faith as we co-reign with God over creation! That is why the Bible calls us to care about what happens on this earth and to this earth. The day is coming when the earth once again will be the dwelling place of God and His glory will be all and in all! May God give us the grace to live in light of this truth today!

Heaven will also be a restoration of our being the possession of God.

Revelation 21:3, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.'"

One of the primary tenants of the Gospel, "the people of God" is quite familiar to us all. Throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, THE universal description of the child of God is that they are "my people."

- "My people" whom Christ came to deliver, Matthew 1:21.
- "My people" whom God sent Moses to save from Pharaoh, Exodus 3:7.
- "My people" to whom God gave a king to be a shepherd, 2 Samuel 3:18.
- "My people" whom the suffering Servant would redeem, Isaiah 53:8.
- "My people" to whom God sent the prophets, Obadiah 13; Micah 2:8-9; Zechariah 8:7-8; Joel 2:27; Amos 7:9
- "My people" with whom God entered into covenant, Hebrews 8:10.

We are the people of God. And yet Revelation 21 speaks as though being "God's people" is something new. So what does this passage mean? How can we become any more God's people in heaven than we already are in Christ today? Notice that our identity as "God's people" is a two-sided coin.

- Positionally/legally we are the people of God in that God owns us today! This is static!
- Practically/literally while we remain the people of God in that all that we have and are, yet at times we still live as rebels!

It is in reference to the latter, our PRACTICE, that we speak of restoration in heaven as the people of God. While today I could wish that

- My hands always labored for the Lord- after all they are His.
- My time always was spent for the Lord- after-all it is His.
- My life was fully given to His glory and cause.

Yet life in this present state of sin and misery daily finds me living not for my God, but oft-times for something or someone else! And thus, rather than fulfilling the call placed on my life, I suffer the consequences of my rebellion and thus lack joy, contentment, and peace. Now in this context notice that Revelation 21:3 tells us that in heaven all of this will be changed. In glory as my salvation is fully consummated in Christ, not only in position but also in practice, we will be wholly God's! Oh what a glorious day that will be when...

- Our hands perfectly do God's will.
- Our mind never again will know a thought that is not captive to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.
- Our whole being from its smallest cell to its greatest thought will work unhindered and undistracted at glorifying and enjoying God!
- Francis Havergal's hymn² no longer will be able to be sung- for...

Our moments and our days will flow with ceaseless praise. Our hands always will move at the impulse of God's love. Our feet will be swift and beautiful for the Master. Our voice will sing always and only for the King. Our lips will be filled only with messages from God. Our valued possession will be heaven. Our intellect will be used as God wills. Our will no longer will be ours, but God's alone. And our SELF will be ever and only for the King!

Heaven is also a restoration of our relationship with God.

John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

The word "know" in this text is a relational term. It suggests NOT a fullness of knowledge, BUT a growing knowledge, a close and intimate knowing of someone.

Genesis 4:17, "Cain knew his wife and she conceived."

The word for "know" in the Septuagint is *ginosko*, the same word used in John.

Amos 3:2, You only have I chosen [lit. "known"] among all the families of the earth."

This doesn't mean that God is limited when it comes to His knowledge of those on this earth; He is Omniscient. Rather, this means that of all the peoples of the earth, only with Israel did God enter into a special, intimate relationship!

When we read of Christ's words to the reprobate on the Last Day:

Matthew 7:23, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...'"

This doesn't mean that Christ had never heard of these unbelievers. But rather, that Christ did not have an intimate relationship with them as their Savior and Lord! So when we read that eternal life is "knowing of God," we conclude that in heaven the relationship man enjoyed with God before the fall will be completely restored! Once again, man will walk with God hand-in-hand and fellowship with Him faces to face.

Yet, doesn't John 17:3 speak of a relationship that we presently have with Christ today? Yet in heaven we know that our knowledge will be different.

1 Corinthians 13:12b, "...now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known."

Well in what way then will heaven be different? To answer this, I want to read from A. A. Hodge...

Imagine the case of Laura Bridgman, born without the sense either of sight or of hearing, and of course utterly unable to conceive the use or the essence of either experience. Suppose that her teacher, endowed with supernatural power, should have placed her some day of the year, in the spring days of her life, on some central tower in the harbour of Boston. At first she would stand in absolute isolation, teeming with force and life and mind, touching the world only through the soles of her feet and the zephyr which fanned her cheek, yet enveloped in darkness and silence infinite, alone and apart as really as if sunk in the abysses of night beyond the orbit of the nethermost sun. // Suppose then her teacher should touch her and say, 'Daughter, hear!' and at once there should flow into her open soul all the myriad voices of the globe. Suppose, again, the teacher should touch her and say, 'Daughter, see!' and suddenly that hitherto isolated soul should pass out in one instant into the infinite world, and take into her irradiated consciousness all the visions of the sea and earth under the stupendous sky. Without moving herself, or any change of environment, the mere opening of ear and eye would widen her horizon infinitely and bring her face to face with a thousand worlds, all new. (Hodge, 1976, pp. 379-380)

This will be the case when we it comes to our relationship with God in heaven, "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face..." (1 Corinthians 13:12)! Truly, though presently in Christ we have come to know God; we walk with Him, talk with Him, and enjoy fellowship with Him (yet never without sin and thus never perfectly) when we enter into our final home it will be as if a thousand-fold senses are awoken in us such that...

- We will see God as He really is.
- We will converse with Him using the language of heaven!
- We will touch Him and feel Him with our hands!

To paraphrase Hodge:

Without any change of our environment, the complete restoration of our relationship with God will widen our horizon infinitely and bring us face to face with God!

Such is the glory that awaits us in Christ! Such are God's plans for us in the Lord- they truly are "for our welfare and not our calamity" (Jeremiah 29:11)! May God give us the grace to live our lives on this earth never doubting His goodness nor expecting Him to give us in this age what He has planned to give us in heaven! Rather, may we labor at "hastening the Kingdom of the Lord" in our own lives and in the lives of others (2 Peter 3:12)!

End Notes

¹ Consider the kingdom language and themes in the first chapters of Genesis: the plural of majesty, "let us...", the calling for Adam and Eve to co-reign with God, the exhortation for them to subdue the earth, etc...
² Red Trinity #585.

Bibliography

Hodge, A. A. (1976). *Evangelical Theology*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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