

THE NEW HEAVEN and THE NEW EARTH



We have been looking in recent sermons at what happens when we die – of more immediate interest to some of us who are nearer the point, than to a young congregation like this!. But Ben’s heart attack, Ruth’s hurried admission to Nobles and Rosemary’s Covid last week remind us that we can never be sure about our lifespan. I have concentrated in my sermons recently on the destiny of our soul, the very centre of our being. Let us be clear, our soul does not die when our mind and body cease to function. My sermon on 19 June under the title “Saved ? From what?”, emphasised the crucial importance of being saved, of accepting Christ’s offer of salvation, of being born again, of being justified. If we are saved we will pass **The Judgement of Faith**. If we pass that judgement our soul will transit from this life into the intermediate heaven called paradise . If we don’t pass that test our soul will transit into the intermediate hell called hades, a forbidding place of torment. Matthew’s Gospel warns of this . *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.* (Matthew 7 vv 13 and 14). Jesus made unmistakably clear in his parable in Luke 16 vv 22 -31 that our soul will go to one of these two realms and remain there irretrievably until **Christ returns**. (see also Ephesians 1:11-14, Hebrews 9:15, and Romans 8:17.)

We who have been saved have this glorious and blissful prospect of Paradise but must beware complacency. Much more is expected of the saved Christian before we die. Werner made this wholly evident in his sermon last Sunday. **Justification** is a question of grateful acceptance but what about the challenge of **sanctification**? From the moment that we are saved we are expected to change our ways, to shake off our old attitudes, habits and behaviours and put on the new nature, growing steadily, daily, hopefully more like JESUS. Werner stressed how hard this is, and that we cannot begin to achieve it in our own strength– taking off the old life and putting on the new is

contrary to our entire selfish nature. That is why we need the Holy Spirit's help urgently and continuously.

It is important to note that the degree of our success or failure in this sanctification endeavour, does not invalidate our salvation, unless we actually turn away from Christ. But as we shall see in this sermon, Sanctification will be very relevant to how we are used by Christ at His Second Coming.

So let us now look at what we know of, this second coming of Jesus, and the Day of Judgment.

Paul says that our saved souls will emerge from the intermediate heaven/paradise (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and that **believers** who at that moment are still alive will follow "close behind. We will be changed - given resurrection bodies - as we are, caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4 v 17).. (see also Psalm 49:15, Daniel 12:2, Romans 8:30.

When all of us stand before the Judgement Seat the unsaved are quickly separated and dispatched into hell for all eternity. The saved will then be subject to a further judgement, sometimes referred to as **The Judgement of Works**, or as 'The Prize Giving.' Our salvation is **not** called into question, but **it is now that our sanctification efforts during our lives on earth are reviewed** – how far we succeeded with the endeavour of sanctification once we were saved. Books will be opened; the Lamb's Book of life (Rev 20 vv 11-15), in which our names are written, will be examined. Our sanctification attitudes – faithfulness, - generosity towards those less fortunate than ourselves – our work as evangelists - our integrity –even our thoughts may be judged. The evidence suggests that some saved souls will come out of this examination better than others, and may be rewarded with greater responsibilities thereafter. After Judgment Day we will, in varying degree, 'reign with Jesus' over the New Heaven and the New Earth. (Isaiah 35 vv 9 and 10; Daniel 7 v 27; 2 Tim 4 v 8; Matthew 19 v 28)

As no one knows when Christ will return or when the New Heaven and the New Earth will be set up, we must rely on what evidence we have, **from the prophets, from what Jesus Himself has said, from the writings of the Apostles and from the Revelation to St John**, the last book in the Bible.

Let us look first at the clues in prophecy.

Amos, himself a prophet said "The Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7.) So what can the prophets tell us about what will happen. Most of the prophets recorded in the Bible were busy warning the people of their day that the first Covenant was coming to an end. The covenant of

atonement based on sacrifices was no longer acceptable to the Lord . (Isaiah 1 v 11 and Jeremiah 31 v31 -34). Under the new covenant about to be introduced, Jesus himself would be the sacrifice, the paschal lamb.

But some of the prophets, Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel, were already looking beyond this New Covenant to see what would follow it. In our first reading from Isaiah 65 we heard what Isaiah was saying - *“For behold,, I (the Lord) will create a new heaven and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind”*. All this Isaiah saw as the culmination of God’s redemption work that had begun in Genesis chapter 3. The New Earth would dispel darkness and exude light, a world of redeemed humanity with God at its literal epicentre.. *“The LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”* (Isaiah 60 v 20).

Isaiah in chapter 35 vv 10 and 11 *prophesied “The redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy; -- and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

Secondly, what did Jesus have to say about the New Heaven and the New Earth?.

As we heard in the Gospel reading Jesus said in John 14 vv 1-15 *““Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. **And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”** This is surely the great expectation of every Christian – to be with Jesus for ever. Jesus in his first coming gives us signs of what His eternal kingdom, , will look like. - It a place where creation is restored, bodies are healed, and the dead are raised. What Jesus inaugurated at his first coming he will consummate at His second*

Thirdly what did the apostles have to say about the New Earth and when it would be?

As we heard in our second reading, Peter wrote in his second letter Chapter 3 about the timing of all this, *“Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward **you not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the works that are done in it will be laid bare”**. Peter is not saying that the earth will be destroyed (any more than the flood brought total destruct), but that the earth will be refreshed, redeemed, renovated, reformed, made new – the same earth but without the corrupting work of satan.*

Finally, we see all of this reflected and amplified in The Revelation to St John the Divine.

“The New Heaven and the New Earth is the eternal dwelling place of those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life”. (Rev 20 vv 11–15).

Famously in chapter 21 he writes *“Then I saw a New heaven and a New Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”.* And He who was seated on the throne said, *“Behold, I am making all things new. Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”* And He said to me, *“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment”.* (Rev 21 vv 1-6).

How can we conclude?

Whereas the New Heaven and the New Earth has not yet happened, and there is so much we do not yet know, the evidence is firm and consistent. But two indications for us today are crystal clear. Firstly, how involved we will be in the New Heaven and the New Earth will depend on our **Sanctification**, on how obedient and responsive we were to the Holy Spirit in this life once we were saved. But secondly and fundamentally, unless we have experienced **justification** we won’t be there at all. Amen.

A prayer. Lord, if there is anyone reading this sermon who has not been saved, please give him or her the courage to ask and give us the wisdom to lead them to the foot of the cross.

Readings:

Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3 vv 8-13; Gospel John 14vv 1-15