

SERIES: LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

Part 12: Heaven: God's Eternal Goodness to You

Welcome back home to your CVCHURCH family. I missed you all last week. I had an incredible time with Benjamin and his wife Kelsey. I was privileged to sit in on one of Benjamin's Master level classes. A highlight for me is that he asked me to engage his class. It was a high moment in my life.

Today, we come to the end of our 12 part series on one of the most famous chapters in the Bible: Psalm 23. There are only six verses, but they are densely packed concerning God's goodness and how He expresses His love and passion towards us. If you have missed any of these life-changing teachings, I encourage you to go on our website and listen to them. They are free of charge. Psalm 23 isn't about you or me or about our trust and faith in God—it is all about God's goodness to us. It is about His unfailing love and commitment to us as His children. In Psalm 23 we have looked at 10 pictures of how God is good to us on a daily basis: **1) God sustains us by meeting all of our needs; 2) He gives us balance by teaching us to relax when we're stressed; 3) He teaches us resilience by renewing our strength when we're empty; 4) He guides us when we're confused so we can give honor to His name in our daily lives; 5) He teaches us how to have a deep confidence when times are dark; 6) He gives us assurance by protecting us when we feel lonely, isolated and insecure; 7) He influences us by demonstrating His public favor on us; 8) He gives us abundance by making sure our lives overflow with His blessings; 9) He demonstrates His goodness, mercy and unfailing love to us no matter what happens, and, today, we look at: 10) His eternal goodness by the inheritance that He has promised to give to everyone who makes Jesus Christ their Lord.** Today, I want to look at **HEAVEN: GOD'S ETERNAL GOODNESS TO YOU.**

Please read with me Psalm 23:6, let's begin, **"Surely goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever."**

I want to ask the question with you today, **WHAT IS HEAVEN?** This is a topic that will demand an entire series by itself, but because here at CVCHURCH we deal with the topics that are brought up by the Bible itself, today's Scripture demands that we discuss what it means that **"I will live in the house of the Lord forever."**

I. Heaven is a physical place, not a state of being

My goal today is to introduce you—in the short time that we have today—to begin to envision the eternal heaven that is waiting for you, if you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, and you live the rest of your days for His glory, honor and purposes and plan for your life and for His Kingdom. I highly recommend that you read your bookmark every day, and, the last 5 days of this year—if you have been reading along with me in our bookmark—you will read the Book of Revelation again this year for your 2nd time. I also highly recommend that you get **Randy Alcorn's book on Heaven**, and I will be quoting from this marvelous book, because it has a lot to teach us about heaven. I have listed his book and **Randy Frazee's book** in your notes. As you do, you will begin to understand in order to get a picture of what heaven looks like, as Alcorn writes, **"Because the Bible tells us that one day heaven will be centered here on the New Earth and that you don't need to look up at the clouds; you simply need to look around you and imagine what all this would be like without sin and death and suffering and corruption."** Colossians 3:1-4 says, **"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all His glory."** Paul directs us to set our hearts on heaven. Question: Will we live in heaven forever? Alcorn writes, **"The answer to the question, 'Will we live in heaven forever?', depends on what you mean by heaven. Will we be with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Yes. Will we always be with Him in exactly the**

same place that heaven is now? No. In the present heaven, we'll be in Christ's presence and we will be joyful, but we'll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and our permanent relocation to the New Earth." This might be shocking to you if you have never thought of it this way before or looked carefully at all of the evidence that is given to us in both the O.T. and the N.T. Jesus says in John 14:1-3, **"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me. 2 There is more than enough room in My Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am."** Jesus is presently preparing our new home for us. This is very important, loved ones. As heaven is real, so is hell. For the permanent heaven to come to the New Earth, God says that this old earth will be judged because of sin. God is waiting to send Jesus back to earth because He is giving everyone who has not repented and surrendered their life to Jesus as their Lord and Savior a chance to keep hearing the Good News and turn their lives over to Him. 2 Peter 3:5-13 says, **"They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of His command, and He brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. 6 Then He used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. 7 And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the Day of Judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. 8 But you must not forget this one thing, dear friend: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. 9 The Lord isn't really being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. 11 Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, 12 looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, He will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. 13 But we are looking forward to**

the new heavens and new earth He has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." Let's look at letter A. Where does a Christian go when they die.

A. When a Christian dies, they go to an intermediary heaven—it is called paradise

In Luke 23:39-43, **"One of the criminals hanging beside Him scoffed, 'So, You're the Messiah, are You? Prove it by saving Yourself—and us, too, while You're at it!' 40 But the other criminal protested, 'Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? 41 We deserve to die for our crimes, but this Man hasn't done anything wrong.' 42 Then he said, 'Jesus remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.' 43 And Jesus replied, 'I assure you, today you will be with Me in paradise.'"** The word paradise comes from the Persian word meaning "a walled park" or "enclosed garden." It was used to describe the great walled gardens of the Persian King Cyrus's royal palaces. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew, the word for paradise is used to describe the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8 and Ezekiel 28:13. The language in Ezekiel is peculiar, because if you will read this section at home, you get the sense that the prophet is talking to the earthly king of Tyre, but sometimes the language turns and it sounds like he is addressing an evil angelic being. I believe this to be one of those prophetic moments where we're given insight into how Lucifer became satan. Because of his pride and rebellion, he was kicked out of heaven and ended up in the Garden of Eden, where he deceived Adam and Eve and turned them against their Creator. Loved ones, God has always been committed to having the earth as the planet that would be His human family's home. What I love about the biblical commitment of our Creator is that He is still committed to having heaven, God's home, to be our home here on this planet. I will explain more in a moment. In an article in the Theological Dictionary of the N.T. it states, **"In the Judaism of the N.T. era, 'The site of reopened Paradise is almost without exception the earth.... The belief in resurrection gave assurance that all the righteous, even those who are dead, would have a share in the reopened paradise.'**

Paradise was not generally understood as mere allegory, with a metaphorical or spiritual meaning, but as an actual physical place where God and His people lived together, surrounded by physical beauty, enjoying great pleasure and happiness.” In the book of Revelation, Jesus says to those in the church of Ephesus in 2:7, **“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what He is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.”** I believe the Bible teaches that the same physical tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden will one day be in the New Jerusalem on the New Earth. Revelation 22:1-2, **“Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, (where, the New Earth which becomes the New Heaven) and His servants will worship Him. 4 And they will see His face and His name will be written on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.”** When Adam and Eve sinned God banned them from the garden, but it appears that Eden’s paradise with the tree of life retained its identity as a physical place but was no longer accessible to humankind. Eden was not destroyed, church. What was destroyed was humankind’s ability to live in Eden. Here is the Good News, and this is worth shouting for. It appears to have remained just as it was, a physical paradise removed to a realm we can’t gain access to—most likely the present heaven, because we know for certain that’s where the tree of life now is according to Revelation 2:7. Alcorn writes, **“God is not done with Eden. The tree of life’s presence in the New Jerusalem establishes that elements of Eden, as physical as the original, will again be part of the human experience. The presence of the tree of life in the present heaven, the intermediate heaven, suggests that heaven, too, has physical properties and is capable of containing physical objects.”** Heaven is a physical place,

not a state of being. When Christians die they go to an intermediate heaven which is defined as the present heaven.

B. The story of Lazarus ascribes physical traits to people

The Lazarus story is found in Luke 16:19-31. For sake of time I won't read it in its entirety. Please go home and read this passage, also. He was a rich man, and Jesus said there was a beggar covered with sores and longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table, but he wasn't given any food, and, Jesus adds, **"Even the dogs came and licked his sores."** Angels come and carry him to Abraham's bosom, which means the beggar was welcomed into the fellowship of other believers, particularly Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, already in heaven or paradise. Consider the story's major components. I have taken this from Alcorn's book. **1) When Lazarus died, angels carried him to paradise. 2) The rich man died and went to a place of torment. 3) Lazarus is with Abraham (and, by inference, others); the rich man is by himself (no one else is mentioned). 4) The intermediate heaven and hell are separated by a fixed chasm. But in this case, people on both sides could see and communicate with each other, at least on a limited basis. (It's possible this was granted to Abraham and the rich man as an exception, not the norm. We shouldn't build a doctrine on it because it's not supported by other references.) 5) Both the rich man and Abraham reasoned and communicated, and they maintained their distinct identities from earth (as did Lazarus), indicating direct continuity from their earthly lives to their afterlives. 6) The rich man and Lazarus are depicted as having physical forms. The rich man had a tongue and a thirst that he wished to satisfy with water. Lazarus had a finger, and there was water available to him in paradise, into which he might dip his finger. (Of course, these references may be entirely figurative. But they might also suggest the possession of transitional physical forms, existing in a physical paradise, to sustain and manifest human identity between death and resurrection.) 7) The rich man certainly remembers—and possibly sees—his lost brothers. He expresses concern for their welfare and asks that Lazarus be sent to warn them. This indicates consciousness after death and clear memory**

of earth and people on earth. 8) Abraham says that, “No one can cross the gap between heaven and hell.” In considering our interpretive position of this parable it is important to not insist that every detail is literal but also recognizing that Jesus intended for us to picture people in the afterlife as real humans with thoughts and capacities and perhaps even forms, and with the same identity, memories, and awareness from their lives and relationships on earth. I believe that Jesus intended us to envision both heaven and hell as real places where there are real people who came from earth. Every one of these teachings is directly or indirectly suggested in other passages in the Bible but none as graphically or memorably as this one. Here is what I want you to see, loved friends. In the intermediate heaven or hell, we will await the time that Jesus says in John 5:28-30, **“Don’t be surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, 29 and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. 30 I can do nothing on My own. I judge as God tells Me. Therefore, My judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the One who sent Me, not My own will.”** Here is the frightening reality of what the Bible describes about the afterlife. Those in hell will live in misery, hopelessness, and apparent isolation and is why Dante, in the Inferno, envisioned this sign chiseled above hell’s gate: “Abandon every hope, you who enter.” While those in heaven will live in comfort, joy, and rich relationship with God and others. This is why the reality of hell should break our hearts and take us to our knees and to the doors of those without Christ. It is very common for many Christians to deny or ignore the clear teaching of Scripture about hell. Here at CVCHURCH we love each other and we love those who presently deny or ignore Jesus. This is why we are committed to being a place to belong, believe and become. I want you to be able to bring your non-believing family members and friends to this safe environment to hear a dangerous message. I know that this teaching today will bother some of you, but that is okay. It is the truth. I would rather you not like me but hear the truth that is being communicated in a loving manner so that you at least hear it, and I trust the Holy Spirit will be faithful with His Word to you, and if you haven’t surrendered your life to Jesus Christ yet, you will today. Because your

CVCHURCH family loves you. This is why we give of our time, talents, touch, treasure, tithe, trauma, and troubles because we believe what God's words says and we want you to come to Jesus and become a part of His family.

II. It's a permanent place that will last forever—heaven comes to earth

From the O.T. through to the N.T. there is passage after passage that speaks about the Messiah, the Son of David, coming to earth to rule forever, and that His Kingdom is everlasting. If you don't know any better it is easy to not understand all of these passages or to just believe they are analogies or metaphor of a disembodied future. But this is far from the truth, loved ones. The Bible teaches that heaven is a permanent place that will last forever and that heaven comes to earth. Revelation 21:1-4 says, **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. 2 And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.'"** Here is something to consider. If God's plan was merely to take humankind to the present heaven, or to a heaven that was a dwelling place of spirit beings, there would be no need for new heavens and a new earth. Why refashion the stars of the heavens and the continents of the earth? God could just destroy His original creation and put it all behind Him. But hear me, loved ones. This is extremely important. He won't do that. Upon creating the heavens and the earth, He called them "very good." Never once has He renounced His claim on what He made. He isn't going to abandon His creation. He's going to restore it. We won't go to heaven and leave earth behind. Rather, God will bring heaven and earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation, no armed angels to guard heaven's perfection from sinful mankind, as in Genesis 3:34. God's perfect plan is "to bring all things in heaven on and earth together under one head even Christ." Ephesians 1:10-11 says, **"And this is the plan:**

At the right time He will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for He chose us in advance, and He makes everything work out according to His plan.”

A. God has an earthly renewal plan

Colossians 1:15-23 is one of the most important and powerful passages we have communicating the divinity of Jesus and how crucial a role He plays in creation, reconciliation and the renewal of this planet. **“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, 16 for through Him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through Him and for Him. 17 He existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together. 18 Christ is also the head of the church, which is His body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So He is first in everything. 19 For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through Him God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. 21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault.”** There is an entire teaching I can do on just this passage, but what I want you to see is that Jesus Christ has paid the price for the cost of our sin and the stain and guilt and damage of our sin, and what Adam and Eve did when they rebelled against God and surrendered their wills to satan’s will. The entire angelic creation and those, especially, who rebelled against God and Jesus, since the Bible says He created them—He has reconciled, meaning He has set the stage for the judgment and destruction of

satan, all demons and humans who rebel against His Lordship and His loving sacrifice. In Jesus Christ, God has never given up on His original creation. Yet, somehow, we've managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear. Listen to these words. RECONCILE. REDEEM. RESTORE. RECOVER. RETURN. RENEW. REGENERATED. RESURRECT. These words mean to buy back what was formerly owned. The earth and the human race. To restore and reestablish a prior friendship and unity. To renew means to make new again, restoring to an original state. Resurrect mean becoming physically alive again after death. These powerful and life-giving words emphasize, loved ones, that God always sees us in light of what He intended us to be, and He always seeks to restore us to that design. Likewise, He sees the earth in terms of what He intended it to be, and He seeks to restore it to its original design.

B. The new earth is the old earth restored

In Acts chapter 3:17-21, Peter seized the moment, after Jesus healed a lame man from birth through Peter and John, to explain that it was Jesus who did it. **“17 Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. 18 But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that He must suffer these things. 19 Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. 20 Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and He will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. 21 For He must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things as God promised long ago through His holy prophets.”** Please read Matthew 19:27-28 and Isaiah 60:1-5, which is the best commentary on Revelation chapters 21-22. When you read Isaiah 60, 65 and 66 you can be certain that's what Isaiah intended, because his precise language is used in John's depiction of the new earth in Revelation 21-22. There will be a time of unprecedented rejoicing in heaven. There will be animals on the new earth. People who dwell on islands will worship God. Loved ones, God is telling us through His revelation, His Word, that our life will be very familiar to us in heaven because the new heaven has come to the new earth. We will love God

and each other. There will be eating, deep, loving relationships without conflict, or war or anger or tears. There will be no sin, no rebellion—only love, joy, creativity—and those who dwell in heaven will have full use of all of their God-given abilities, skills and talents as they serve to rule and reign with God just as He intended for Adam and Eve. God will not be denied, and He went to lengths that satan and no human ever thought He would in sending His Son, who is fully God and fully human, to come and die to redeem, to buy back what is rightfully His—us and this planet and the universe. Once you get this it will change your life forever. You will understand that our vision here: A GREAT COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMANDMENT AND THE GREAT COMMISSION WILL DEVELOP A GREAT CHRISTIAN AND A GREAT CHURCH, will cause you to want to love and serve Jesus, His church and your culture as never before. Let heaven fill your mind, your emotions, your will, and your senses. It is time. Now is the time to be unleashed in His purposes for your life and our lives together here at CVCHURCH.

III. It's a place reserved for God's family only

Ancient cities kept rolls of their citizens. Guards were posted at the city gates to keep out criminals and enemies by checking their names against the list. This is the context for Revelation 21:27, **“Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”**

Ruthanna Metzgar, a professional singer, tells a story that illustrates the importance of having our names written in the book. Several years ago, she was asked to sing at the wedding of a very wealthy man. According to the invitation, the reception would be held on the top two floors of Seattle’s Columbia Tower, the Northwest’s tallest skyscraper. She and her husband, Roy, were excited about attending. At the reception, waiters in tuxedos offered luscious hors d’oeuvres and exotic beverages. The bride and groom approached a beautiful glass and brass staircase that led to the top floor. Someone ceremonially cut a satin ribbon draped across the bottom of the stairs. They announced the wedding feast was about to begin. Bride and

groom ascended the stairs, followed by their guests. At the top of the stairs, a maître d' with a bound book greeted the guests at the doors. "May I have your name please?" "I am Ruthanna Metzgar, and this is my husband, Roy." He searched the M's. "I'm not finding it. Would you spell it please?" Ruthanna spelled her name slowly. After searching the book the maitre d' looked up and said, "I'm sorry, but your name isn't here." "There must be some mistake," Ruthanna replied. "I'm the singer. I sang for this wedding!" the gentleman answered, "It doesn't matter who you are or what you did. Without your name in the book you cannot attend the banquet." He motioned to a waiter and said, "Show these people to the service elevator, please." The Metzgars followed the waiter past beautifully decorated tables laden with shrimp, smoked salmon, and magnificent carved ice sculptures. Adjacent to the banquet area, an orchestra was preparing to perform, the musicians all dressed in dazzling white tuxedos. The waiter led Ruthanna and Roy to the service elevator, ushered them in and pushed G for the parking garage. After locating the car and driving several miles in silence, Roy reached over and put his hand on Ruthanna's arm. "Sweetheart, what happened?" "When the invitation arrived, I was busy," Ruthanna replied. "I never bothered to RSVP. Besides, I was the singer. Surely I could go to the reception without returning the RSVP!" Ruthanna started to weep, not only because she had missed the most lavish banquet she'd ever been invited to, but also because she suddenly had a small taste of what it will be like someday for people as they stand before Jesus Christ and find their names are not written in the Lamb's book of life.

(Note to ProPresenter operator: there will be more script, but not slides)