

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

What Will Heaven Be Like?

January 15, 2018

Colossians 3:1-2

¹ 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.

When we set our sights on heaven and start to imagine all the glorious things we will experience, many questions come to mind. Last week we kicked off the "Imagine Heaven" series with the question, "Who will be there?" This past weekend, we looked at the question, "What will heaven be like?"

A description of heaven can be found in Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Many believe the author of Revelation is the Apostle John who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Jesus called him "Beloved" and included him in his closest circle of trusted friends. Revelation's description of heaven was inspired from a vision that John received years after Jesus left earth to return to heaven.

Revelation 21:10-21

¹⁰ So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal. ¹² The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ When he measured it, he found it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles. ¹⁷ Then the angel measured the wall using human measurement. It was 216 feet thick. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. ¹⁹ The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl. And the main street was gold, as pure as transparent glass.

Streets of gold in a city that sparkles like precious stones and is as clear as crystal -- the picture that John paints for us is truly amazing, but it undoubtedly pales

in comparison to what it really is like. John could not adequately describe the beauty of what he experienced because he could only draw from earthly terms.

I love the example Ben gave this past weekend. He tried to capture the beauty of an Israeli city through a photo. His eyes were able to capture the beauty in front of him, but the photo didn't do it justice.

I can relate to this. I have witnessed several beautiful sunsets over Lake Michigan. However, sharing them on film with friends or placing them on Facebook never captures the true beauty that I experienced.

When it comes to heaven, there is so much more than a beautiful place to experience. As we talked about last week, the highlight of heaven is that God will be there.

Heaven will also be a place of "no mores". Unlike our experiences here on earth, there will be no more natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, or fires. Physically, heaven will be a place of no more pain, hunger, sickness, or death. Emotionally, there will be no more worry, fear, jealousy, betrayal, or loneliness. And there will be no more sorrow as Jesus will personally wipe away every tear.

Revelation 21:4

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.

Spiritually, there will be no more separation from God. There will be no more sin, no more Satan, and no spiritual darkness or spiritual attacks trying to keep you from knowing God.

Ben used the word "freedom" to describe heaven. It really is the perfect word as heaven is where we will experience the freedom that God always intended us to have. Freedom from all of our suffering, from our hardships, pain, and distress.

While the promise of freedom gives us the hope of an amazing future, many of us are shackled by the struggles of today and are looking for freedom here on earth. The good news is that we can begin experiencing freedom now. As Ben talked about last week, knowing God is the first step in our spiritual journey. Finding freedom is our next step after knowing God.

Many of us try to do this in reverse though. We think we need to change the things that hold us back, such as our regrets, shame, habits and/or pain to get to God. But the truth is, we need to get to God first, then he will change the things in our life and grant us freedom.

If you are unsure of what it means to have a personal relationship with God, talk with your Group leader or member of your campus staff, or attend Week One of GrowthTrack in February.

(www.cedarcreek.tv/growthtrack)

While only a personal relationship with Jesus can provide us with eternal freedom, we can experience additional freedom through our relationships with those around us..

James 5:16

¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

We can find freedom by engaging in authentic relationships with people that will help us get through life's challenges. Many of us can say we have friends, but are they friends that will help us get through our struggles? Are they friends that we can be real with? Will they pray for us, encourage us, and point us to God? These relationships are powerful, can lead to healing, and produce wonderful results.

As a church, we recognize the importance of authentic relationships, and it's our hope for each of you to be surrounded by others who will help you find freedom.

In order to help people find freedom through authentic relationship, we offer Groups where people can be known by name, share their struggles, pray for each other, and discuss scripture. Consider joining a group! We kick off a new semester this month!

Questions:

When imagining heaven, how would you describe it?

How do authentic relationships help you find freedom?

Next Step:

Continue reading this week's LivingItOut and discovering what it means to be free.

Consider joining a Group. You can search the Group directory at www.cedarcreek.tv/groups.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 8

This Week's Prayer Focus:

Personally, pray for God to help you find freedom from areas of ongoing struggle. Ask him to help you identify the areas that are keeping you from knowing him better and holding you back from being a difference maker. Ask, what step you

need to take this year to find freedom. Collectively, let's pray that CedarCreek will be a place where thousands of people will find freedom this year and that our relationships with each other will be authentic.

Today's Prayer Focus:

Day 8 – The Lost – friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers, etc.

The World's Falling Apart

January 16, 2018

2018 is barely two weeks old, and I'm already tired of it. On January 2, my oldest child woke us up at 3:00 in the morning reporting that she had just thrown up - - and she continued to do so for the next 12 hours. That night, my three-year-old pressed repeat, and we spent another night with a bucket. Then it was my turn. My 20-month-old was next, followed by my five-year-old. And my husband rounded it out on Friday. Needless to say, when the last of us got through it, we exhaled a big sigh of relief. And then my oldest woke up with a 103°+ fever on Saturday, and the process resumed to some degree for the next four days. Then, while we were enjoying a quiet Sunday recovering, I heard my husband yell, "Oh no!" followed by an audible, gushing explosion as our grinder pump spewed sewer waste all over our basement for the second time in three weeks, dousing our kids' artwork, cards, and countless other items in our basement. And the garage door opener usually will not work in the car, so we have to go into the house and force it shut while everyone waits in the car. And the snow blower broke, and, and, and... Sometimes it seems as though this world we live in is falling apart. We are constantly fixing things that are broken, replacing things that have worn out, and looking for newer and better things to make our broken existence somehow seem more tolerable.

Stepping back from our individual lives, we can see evidence of creation falling apart before our eyes. There are snowstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes in which "creation is groaning" under the weight of the consequences of sin. Creation itself is eagerly waiting for the day when God will restore our world to what it was meant to be.

Romans 8:19-22

¹⁹ For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Creation is not the only place where we see the breakdown of our world. People live in fear of their neighbors. The rulers of this world are corrupted by greed and power. We save for retirement only to lose it all when the stock market crashes. It seems that there is little we can depend on in this world except deterioration.

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

There are moments, however, where we see glimpses of what heaven must be like. Think of the most beautiful place you have ever visited. I remember staring out across the Grand Canyon and being in awe of its majesty. Or looking down from the top of a mountain in Colorado at a nearby lake and thinking there are few things on earth more beautiful. Or staring across the desert in Arizona in the darkness as stars shoot across the sky. While creation is groaning under the weight of sin, we still can see glimpses of heaven. However, even the most beautiful sights here on earth will pale in comparison to the beauty we will experience when we get to heaven. In heaven, God will make “everything new.” The “first heaven and the first earth will pass away.” (Revelation 21)

Paul wrote in Romans 8:21 that creation will join believers in “glorious freedom.” Isaiah writes in Isaiah 64:4 that “For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him!” The book of Revelation lists countless images that John uses to describe heaven.

Revelation 19: 11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

Revelation 21:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Our simple, finite minds cannot even begin to grasp the beauty of heaven. It is almost easier for us to skip over this part of the Bible because it is so beyond our comprehension. And yet, God saw fit to bless us with the promise of heaven in the Bible. When thinking about heaven, we should have hope that the groaning of this world will be overshadowed when we finally experience the redemption of creation and our souls.

Questions:

Paul uses strong words to describe creation’s anticipation of the restoration of Christ’s rule on earth. Look back throughout the passages noted above and take note of the words used to describe creation as it is now and how it will be in heaven. How does that make you feel?

Next Steps:

Read Revelation 21. Try to imagine what heaven will be like. Think about what it would have been like to be John as he watched this unfold before his eyes.

Prayer:

God, my finite mind cannot wrap itself around the majesty of heaven. I am often so caught up in the groanings of this world that I forget that these trials are nothing compared to the riches and glory I will experience when I get to heaven. When I am caught in a cycle of despair, help me remember that the trials of this world will pass away, but your rule will last forever. Thank you for the hope and help you have given us to endure the trials we face. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 9**This Week's Prayer Focus:**

Personally, pray for God to help you find freedom from areas of ongoing struggle. Ask him to help you identify the areas that are keeping you from knowing him better and holding you back from being a difference maker. Ask, what step you need to take this year to find freedom. Collectively, let's pray that CedarCreek will be a place where thousands of people will find freedom this year and that our relationships with each other will be authentic.

Today's Prayer Focus:

Day 9 – Groups – leaders, members, real life change to happen in our Groups..

A Pain Free Eternity

January 17, 2018

Can you think back to a time you have been to the hospital? Maybe it was to visit someone, or perhaps you were the patient. Maybe you work at the hospital. How did you feel being there? Whatever the situation, most everyone can agree that hospitals are not the most pleasant of environments to be in. After all, hospitals exist and stay in business because people get sick or injured.

Any time we personally experience physical pain and illness, or when the people who are so important to us get sick, we tend to ask, "Why?" It's hard to understand why bad things happen to each person; however, the only reason that physical pain, illness, and darkness exist in this world is because of sin. When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he intended them to be whole, healthy, and to solely live a life filled worshipping him. It all fell apart as a result of disobedience, when Adam and Eve took just one bite of the forbidden fruit. God had warned that if they did eat from that tree, they would surely die. That leads to the obvious question: So what happens to our bodies once we get to heaven? When we look at Scripture, we are promised new and whole bodies in heaven free from the limitations of our earthly bodies.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

¹ "For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. ² We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. ³ For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. ⁴ While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. ⁵ God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit."

The Scripture above relates to all of us in the fact that our physical bodies do grow weary on this earth. We become exhausted and sometimes experience physical pain and sickness. But there's encouragement in this Scripture as well. We will have new heavenly bodies that God has prepared himself. No more sickness, no more pain, and no more exhaustion.

Isaiah 65:17-25 gives us a brief but powerful glimpse of what to look forward to in heaven:

*¹⁷ "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth,
and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.*

*¹⁸ Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation!
And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness.*

Her people will be a source of joy.

¹⁹ *I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and delight in my people.
And the sound of weeping and crying
will be heard in it no more.*

²⁰ *“No longer will babies die when only a few days old.
No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life.
No longer will people be considered old at one hundred!
Only the cursed will die that young!*

²¹ *In those days people will live in the houses they build
and eat the fruit of their own vineyards.*

²² *Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses
and confiscate their vineyards.
For my people will live as long as trees,
and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains.*

²³ *They will not work in vain,
and their children will not be doomed to misfortune.
For they are people blessed by the Lord,
and their children, too, will be blessed.*

²⁴ *I will answer them before they even call to me.
While they are still talking about their needs,
I will go ahead and answer their prayers!*

²⁵ *The wolf and the lamb will feed together.
The lion will eat hay like a cow.
But the snakes will eat dust.
In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain.
I, the Lord, have spoken!”*

God promises believers a place of happiness for eternity. No more weeping, no more crying. Life will never end, and we will never grow old. Before we even think about our needs, God will be taking care of them. One thing that sticks out in the beginning of the scripture is that God references the city of Jerusalem. Cities are not made up of one single person; they are composed of a community of people. And that's how we live today. God knows we cannot live on our own here, that we need the support of others in our pain, our sorrow, and our sickness. In heaven, we will have the joy of being surrounded with people we will know.

Questions:

What pain or illness have you encountered lately, and how did you overcome it?
What people have been placed in your life to walk with you through challenges?

Next Steps:

Think about the community of people you have surrounded yourself with and

how they, along with God, have loved on you and impacted your life. Meditate on heaven and the promise of a future perfect body without pain, disease, and death.

Prayer:

God, thank you so much for this new day you have set before me. Thank you that you have placed me right here where I can love and serve you by loving and serving others. Help me to be connected with the support groups I have in my life, and help me to be a supportive friend to others. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 10

This Week's Prayer Focus:

Personally, pray for God to help you find freedom from areas of ongoing struggle. Ask him to help you identify the areas that are keeping you from knowing him better and holding you back from being a difference maker. Ask, what step you need to take this year to find freedom. Collectively, let's pray that CedarCreek will be a place where thousands of people will find freedom this year and that our relationships with each other will be authentic.

Today's Prayer Focus:

Day 10 – GrowthTrack and Serve Teams – leadership development, covering over every leader, fresh vision.

Love In Its Purest Form

January 18, 2018

Being a medical student means I see many different types of patients each day; some I click with and others I don't. Recently, I saw a patient who was an older lady and at the end of our encounter, she said "I love you" in the endearing way a grandmother would use the phrase. I impulsively repeated these three words back to her just as you would tell the cashier at a grocery store to also have a good day after they wished you the same. I walked out of the room and chuckled to myself a bit - how funny that I just said these three words to somebody I had met only 15 minutes earlier. Unfortunately, though, "I love you" is a term too casually thrown around in our society today. While the quick "love you" at the end of a phone call with a family member can be endearing, we often see people posting "love you" on Instagram and Facebook posts. Even worse, younger people in relationships often use this phrase as a means to an end, often intended to keep the relationship going or to gain something more out of the relationship. Sometimes it is hard not to wonder what these three words really mean; what is the depth of these frivolous "I love yous?"

Much of the time, there isn't much depth to it. It is simply a reflex, an impulsive act, or a selfish way to get what is desired from another person. These attributes are not the intention of love as God had planned. As Paul says...

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. ⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

This doesn't sound like the "love" I've been seeing in our world today. Sadly, what we describe as love in our society often brings about pain, jealousy, anger, and sometimes even the exact opposite: hate.

Fortunately for us, our future heavenly life will only consist of pure love, not the senseless love we repeatedly witness on earth. Revelation describes the walls and streets of heaven as consisting of "pure gold, as clear as glass." We will be together with God in our perfect, glorious body, which will endure "no more death or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (Revelation 21:4). That means no more stressful work days, no more struggles to pay bills, no more worry about upcoming exams, no more arguing, no more fake love, and no more hate. All those who inherit the kingdom of God will also enjoy the emotional freedom of heaven, that which comes with God's love.

We all have our own ways of managing emotional distress in our lives. Maybe you see a counselor or you run to relieve stress and clear your mind. Maybe you find support in a close friend or a significant other. But, this emotional relief is often temporary and partial. The torment of life continues to creep back, and we continuously put up a fight to quiet these new stresses. We can alleviate these stresses by giving our problems to God as it says in Matthew 11:28, “come to me, all of you who are burdened and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” In heaven, however, these distressing thoughts and burdens will be no more – we will only have rest. We will be emotionally whole as a result of God’s love and the love that will endure in others. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 (NIV), “for we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears... and three [will remain]: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” In this passage, we can interpret our earthly life to be “in part,” while “completeness” describes heaven when we are united with our Lord. The Oxford dictionary defines “complete” as having all the necessary or appropriate parts – *we will not have to work for love, it will simply be there in its purest, intended form.*

Questions:

How can we emulate simple heavenly love here on earth?

What emotions are you most looking forward to finding freedom from in heaven?

Next Steps:

Reflect on the love you have toward others, and pray for God to help you demonstrate *his* true love.

Prayer:

My Lord, help me to truly love those around me in a pure way as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. Help me to love with a pure and simple heart, just as you loved us when you gave your life for us. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 11

This Week’s Prayer Focus:

Personally, pray for God to help you find freedom from areas of ongoing struggle. Ask him to help you identify the areas that are keeping you from knowing him better and holding you back from being a difference maker. Ask, what step you need to take this year to find freedom. Collectively, let’s pray that CedarCreek will be a place where thousands of people will find freedom this year and that our relationships with each other will be authentic.

Today’s Prayer Focus:

Day 11 – CedarCreek Kids

This post was written by Sandy Tadros, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study

Restoration of a Masterpiece

January 19, 2018

For many years, the painting “Adoration of the Shepherds” by Italian Renaissance master Sebastiano del Piombo was hidden in storage away from public view. An attempt to lift the painting off of its original wooden panel and transfer it to canvas in the 1700s left it damaged almost beyond repair. “Every now and then our people would take a look at it and walk away again, sadly shaking their heads,” said Rupert Featherstone, director of the Hamilton Kerr Institute, a world leader in conservation research and techniques.

Over a span of nearly ten years, thousands of hours were devoted to restoring the painting: restoring the original colors, reconstructing missing areas, and uncovering hidden layers. The finished restoration was hailed as the “rescue of a masterpiece” and is now on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. A masterpiece that was once relegated to a storage closet is now on display in a world-renowned museum for all the world to admire.

Do you know that God promises to restore the earth the same way “Adoration of the Shepherds” was restored?

In Revelation 21: 3-5, John says:

³I 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. ⁴He 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.” ⁵And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”

We sometimes like to think of heaven as an alternative to this world, but it is actually more like a restoration, or rehabilitation of this world. When Jesus died on the cross, he defeated sin, death, and Satan. Although defeated, they were not destroyed. This means, that although God is in control, we still feel and experience the negative effects of sin and death while we live on this earth.

Right now, the earth resembles the “Adoration of the Shepherds” before it was restored. We get sick, we die, we do horrible things to each other. Natural disasters, famine, war, and conflict occur. It may be tempting to look at this world and walk away, sadly shaking your head. However, when we read the verse above, God promises to **destroy** death, sorrow, and pain forever. One day, we will experience freedom from Satan, sin, and spiritual darkness. In heaven, we will experience a spiritual restoration.

In Revelations 20:10, God promises:

¹⁰ Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This is the final destination of Satan. When he is thrown into the fiery lake, the power of sin and death will be destroyed forever. In heaven, we will experience freedom from sickness, sadness, and sin. We will experience freedom physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Questions:

What are some things on earth that need restoration?

What are some things in your life that need restoration?

Next Steps:

Take a moment to visualize what the earth restored will be like. Think about death and sin being destroyed. Imagine heaven as you understand it from the recent messages.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for defeating Satan and sin by dying on the cross. Thank you for your promise to destroy Satan and sin forever. Please help me to live my life today in a way that honors and anticipates these promises. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 12

This Week's Prayer Focus:

Personally, pray for God to help you find freedom from areas of ongoing struggle. Ask him to help you identify the areas that are keeping you from knowing him better and holding you back from being a difference maker. Ask, what step you need to take this year to find freedom. Collectively, let's pray that CedarCreek will be a place where thousands of people will find freedom this year and that our relationships with each other will be authentic.

Today's Prayer Focus:

Day 12 – CedarCreek Students

Saturday's Prayer Focus:

Day 13 - The weekend church service as we enter week 3 of "Imagine Heaven."

Sunday's Prayer Focus:

Day 14 - Praying for all people in their journey of faith to know God, find freedom, discover purpose, and make a difference.