



24. NO MORE NIGHT: The Final Empire

When people were asked to share their opinion of heaven, some very interesting responses were given. One person responded: "Heaven is a state of mind. It's an inner peace; it's an inner calm." Another said: "Heaven is my house, you should see it. It's worth 3 million dollars. My chariot is my Lexus – the angels are my kids." Really? His kids are angels? All the time? Another fellow responded: "Heaven – are you so out of touch that you still believe in those fairy tales?" In other words, "give me a break, you don't really believe that stuff do you?" Finally an older couple said: "We hope heaven is a real place. The older we get the more we long for it. We just hope that what we were taught in our childhood is true." A longing in their hearts for something better. With all this talk about God's Last Empire is there really a heaven and a new world?

One of the great truths of the Bible is the certainty of a new world. In Hebrews 11, Paul talked about a royal line of faith who looked forward to a wonderful new world: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland...that is, a heavenly country" (Hebrews 11:13,14,16). Moses sure believed it: "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26). So sure was Moses of the marvellous future that God promised, that he turned down all the wealth and pleasures of the opulent Egyptian palace.

Peter sure believed it was real: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). There had been no question about this in his mind for years. On the day of Pentecost Peter had exclaimed: "And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20,21). Peter boldly looked forward to a day when God would restore everything to what it was before this horrible nightmare that has brought untold heartaches to man and God. And oh how we need a day when things will be restored. Look around you. The world is groaning for restoration.

Jesus Christ made a pristine world for the bright eyed caretakers of this planet - Adam and Eve. But you know the story: One day into the garden sneaked the Devil, speaking through a snake, and our first parents sold out on God for this liar and murderer. Sin quickly multiplied and the world became so corrupt that God had to start again after Noah's flood. But after the flood sin soon multiplied again and has been wreaking havoc ever since. We see it all around our world: Lives snuffed out by senseless bus bombings; a seven year old child with leukemia, soon to die at just the beginning of life; wasted lives of youth on drugs in the prime of life; shattered dreams of a couple whose bright plans for a future together lie in tatters as she lies in hospital with terminal cancer; broken people with broken hearts because of unfaithful spouses; on the nightly news, one litany of destruction after another, and emaciated kids with hollow faces starving to death in Africa. A new world - Eden must and will be restored one day. Oh, how we should keep it in focus! Jesus did: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross..." (Hebrew 12:1,2). Ah, it was the forever hope of having his children in His restored new world says Paul, that helped Jesus endure the tortures of Calvary.

So what will life be like in the new world? Actually, words are inadequate to express the beauties of it. In talking about all the things that God has prepared for His children, the Bible says: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Just think of the most momentous occasions we experience in life: the sounds of beautiful music; the support of a close friend in a time of need; for a young married couple it would probably be the birth of their first child; for young people nothing beats hanging out with your friends. Now multiply all that by infinity and you start to come close to what God is preparing for His friends.

So what will life be like in the new world? Firstly it will be a time and place of eternal peace. The Bible says: "Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, Neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise" (Isaiah 60:18). "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Imagine a world with no more war, which is all some people in some parts of our world have known all their life. Imagine a place with no more violent crimes, no more traumatized victims of armed robberies and rape. No more verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

Secondly it will be a place of eternal health: "And the inhabitant will not say, 'I am sick'" (Isaiah 33:24). Just imagine it: no more sickness and no more hospitals. But that's not all: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened..." (Isaiah 35:5). No more blindness and glasses. Some people have lived in a world of darkness, but one day the first thing they will see will be the face of Jesus who died to make all the realities of eternal life possible for them. They will look into the faces of fathers and mothers who have loved them so dearly. But there's more: "And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). No more deafness. Imagine the joy for those who for the first time hear those wonderful words which we take for granted: "I love you." They will hear the birds chirping and the sound of a babbling brook for the first time ever. What a wonderful new world God is preparing for His children. But there's even more: "Then the lame shall leap like a deer..." (Isaiah 35:6). No more cripples, quadriplegics or paraplegics. No more wheel chairs. Think of the joy of these people on that day who will run like the wind in God's new world. But we still haven't finished: "And the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35:6). No more speech impediments. What a thrill it will be for those who have never talked to be able to express themselves as they have really wanted to. They will be foremost in praising Jesus their creator and redeemer. In fact our whole bodies will be changed in one incredible marvelous way: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20,21). Did you get that – we will all have new bodies like Christ's.

The new world will also be a place of eternal life: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Oh how we love those promises of hope – nearly every funeral we attend we are reminded of them: No more heartbreaking news of the loss of a love one; no more tears and grief and loss; no more partings; no more night! No wonder John exclaimed: "Even so come Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Then again it will be a place of eternal beauty: "And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). Many of us have travelled to some of the most apparently God-forsaken places on earth – blazing hot deserts and ice-cold deserts. But there is coming a day when these places will be like flower gardens – full of beauty.

Eternal creativity is something else to look forward to in God's Last Empire. There will be much to do. Speaking from the perspective of the ancient Israelites, the Bible says: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit" (Isaiah 65:21). In others words we will be involved in creative things in the new world. Scientists will be able to continue to study the marvels of outer space and probe the incredible workings of the human body. Musicians will reach their full potential. Those who enjoy crafting things with their hands will continue at greater levels of skill.

The final empire will be a place of indescribable eternal joy: “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). In our own lives we fluctuate between times of joy and sadness, anxiety and worry. But not in the new world. Things will be very different. Can you imagine a world always full of joy?

In the final empire Sabbath's will be special: “And it shall come to pass that from...one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD” (Isaiah 66:23). I just love Sabbath! Imagine what it will be like to attend a Sabbath worship service and Jesus is the preacher. You couldn't get a better sermon. Sabbath luncheons on this earth are just great. But in the new world that is coming, they will be absolutely mind boggling - a table miles long to seat everybody! And you choir and music buffs will never have it so good. Just think of it - joining in with Gabriel and the heavenly angel choirs during the Sabbath morning praise and worship time. Some of you just love to chat with friends on Sabbath – well in God's forever home you will be able to chat with Moses, Esther or Paul (just to name a few Bible greats) after the Sabbath worship service. We must not miss the new earth for anything.

What other surprises does God have in store? Well in the first instance our home will be literally out of this world. Christ made a promise to His disciples before He returned to heaven: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). Remember where the Father lives, to whose house Jesus will take His friends to be with Himself? The Lord's prayer clearly informs us: “Our Father, Who is IN HEAVEN...” So Jesus is going to take His friends first of all to heaven where they will live for 1000 years in heaven with Christ: “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:5,6).

But finally, after the 1000 years, the final empire will be in this world. Jesus said: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). So this world will become our final home. But notice what will be the capital of planet Earth: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). Notice what a marvellous city the New Jerusalem will be: “The twelve gates were twelve pearls...” (Revelation 21:21). Incredible! Every one of the 12 gates is made of one great ginormous pearl. Perhaps one of the reasons God informs us that there will be 12 gates, is because He wants us to know there is abundant entrance into His kingdom. God is not trying to keep anyone out. Rather it is a very accessible city – we can enter from every point of the compass – whoever will may come! Heaven's goal is to get as many in as possible! But that's not all. John continued to look at this amazing city: “Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:14). Perhaps God is telling us by the fact that the apostles' names are on the foundations, that if Christ's followers with all their faults can make it – so can you! Don't give up when you stumble and make mistakes. You can triumph through the blood of Christ. You too can make it! Then notice that the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: “And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass” (Revelation 21:19,21). God is saying in reality: “The city is so valuable because you are so valuable!”

But let's come to the high point of the final empire. God will live with humanity on this world: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’” (Revelation 21:3). “The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:3,4). Can you believe it! This world that has brought untold heartache to God for centuries. This world where God became flesh and lived among us, where God's hands were nailed to rough timbers and where men spat in His face and lacerated His back. This world will be the place where God will live with us humans! It will become the centre of the universe!

Amazing love and grace for a world that does not love Him. You see the final empire will be Eden more than restored, because God Himself will live with us.

What do we need to do to be there? The Bible gets right to the heart of the matter as it comes to an end: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27). We must have our name written in the Book of Life by accepting Jesus: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11,12). Have you accepted Christ as your Saviour? Do you believe He took your sins, even yours to the cross? The moment a sinner comes to Christ by faith, that moment they are pardoned. Christ accepts them. He forgives every sin they have ever done no matter how deep it is. If you have thrown your helpless self on Christ then your name is in the book of life. But we also need to keep our name in that book because the Bible is clear that names can be taken out: "If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city..." (Revelation 22:19). Names remain in the Book of Life when we lovingly obey God's commandments. Jesus said: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Are you following Christ in obeying all His word and commandments that you know? If you are then your name will remain in the book of life. In a nutshell it means we have eternal life – we will be in God's final empire - if we trust and keep following Christ wherever He leads. Right now why not decide to make Christ your Saviour, friend and the captain of your life. You will never be happier than when you are yielding everything to His control!