

Hebrews – One Breath Away - Hebrews 10:26-31

Sign Title: One Breath Away

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Has anyone gone snorkeling or scuba diving? I have done some snorkeling. Years ago I bought a mask, snorkel and flippers. While our family was at a beach full of children building sand castles, I squeezed into the flippers, stretched on the mask, bit onto the snorkel and jumped into the lake.

I discovered a completely different and amazing world that was all around me, but it was out of view. The fish were beautiful, the water was clear and the sand teemed with life. This was an amazing and beautiful world that was so close to me, yet I never realized it. It was all just one breath away.

Last week in our study of Hebrews, we looked at Hebrews 10:26-31 which grabbed our throat and pinned us to the wall.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God... It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:26-27,31

This passage is one of the strongest warnings in the Bible about the danger of choosing to cherish sin while claiming to cherish Christ. This Scripture provides a fearfully strong incentive. None of us want to fall into the hands of the living God.

As I considered following up on this frightful passages, I thought it would be good to look at the topic of perseverance from a different angle. The Bible tells us to persevere not because of the fearful things that await us if we don't but we are to persevere because of the delightful things that await us if we do. How

much do you know about the joys that await us in heaven with Jesus? Pleasures that are just one breath away.

As I began studying heaven, one thing became obvious to me. Most of us know very little about it and even great Bible scholars don't talk about it. For example:

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of my spiritual heroes who wrote a 900 page book called The Great Doctrines of the Bible. Do you know how many pages he devoted to heaven? Two.

Louis Berkhoff wrote a massive 737 page Systematic Theology that is required reading for most seminary students. How many pages does he write about heaven? One

Since we talk about it so little, nobody is excited about going there. In fact most people picture eternity is boring. Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* pictures heaven as boring.

“She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it... I ask her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”¹

This is why we end up with cartoons like this. What do you think? Will eternity be boring? What will eternity be like? Let's find out because once you know, you will *want* to be there!



There are two heavens.

¹ The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pg. 6

We usually refer to heaven as the place Christians go when they die. This is what we tell our children, "Grandma died, she is in heaven". But is that true? Will Grandma live forever-after in heaven? Actually the answer is No, when Christians die, they do not go to heaven where they will live forever. Instead we go to an intermediate heaven. In that intermediate heaven those who die await Christ's return to earth, our bodily resurrection, the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and earth. When Christians die, do they go immediately to be with the Lord forever, Yes. As Paul says

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8

Will we be with the Lord forever after we die, Yes; but we will not reside forever in heaven in the way it currently exists.

Let me suggest an analogy. Suppose you live in a homeless shelter in Miami. One day you inherit a beautiful house overlooking Santa Barbara, California. You board a flight for your trip. On your way you have a 12 hour lay over in Dallas. Now when the ticket agent asks you where are you headed, what will you say? Santa Barbara, by way of Dallas.

Most books on heaven fail to distinguish between the present heaven and the eternal heaven on the new earth. This is a massive blind spot in modern Christianity and not knowing this difference gives us a warped picture of eternity.

Revelation 21 says the present heaven will be relocated to the New Earth. Similarly, what we now refer to as Hell will also be relocated after the Great White Throne judgment to the Lake of Fire. When heaven is relocated to the new earth

for eternity, life will be similar to what we now know, only exponentially better and completely without the affects of sin.

So the question, “What is heaven like?” really has two different answers. The present heaven where believers go when they die is located in the angelic realm and is distinctly separate from the earth. By contrast, the future Heaven will be in the earthly physical realm, on the renewed earth where we have renewed indestructible, physical resurrection bodies. Then the dwelling place of God will also be the dwelling place of humanity, in a resurrected universe. This may be new to your thinking but the Bible is very clear about it.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’
Revelation 21:1-3

Most people view eternity as anti-incarnational. Many of us have bought into something called Christoplatonism. Plato popularized the view that matter is evil and spirit is good. We think of our bodies as evil and something to be shed away at death like a snake molts his skin. We think of our physical bodies and the tangible world as sub spiritual. Folks, that is not what the Bible says. God designed us with bodies. When God created this world, he said it was *very good*. Matter is not evil, we are designed by God for a body and for this world.

Revelation says God’s plan for us is to be a resurrected people that will receive resurrected incorruptible bodies and we will live on a resurrected earth. Just as Christ coming to earth was about God fusing himself with a real human body, the new heaven and earth is about God fusing heaven with earth, an earth

free from the destruction of sin. Rather than our going up to be with God forever, God will come down to live with forever. Simply put, though the present Heaven is “up there”, the future eternal Heaven will be “down here.” If we miss this and adopt a Christoplatonic view of life that is anti-body and anti-matter, we can not understand the joys of eternity.

What will our life be like in the present heaven?

What happens after we die? Some people believe the soul sleeps or there is a long period of unconsciousness between life on earth and life in Heaven. The Bible doesn't say that. When the thief died on the cross next to Jesus in Luke 23:43, Jesus said, *“Today, you will be with me in paradise.”* 2 Corinthians 5:8 says *“to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”* Philippians 1:23 says *“those who die are with Christ.”* So when we die, our consciousness is NOT snuffed out rather we continue to exist and have full consciousness from the moment of death onward. It is like snorkeling, we just into a different and amazing world that is only one breath away.

What is this present heaven is like? In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus gives us a window to see.

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you

cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ” Luke 16:19-31

Something we need to know is the word *hell* in v.23 has a footnote to it. The footnote says, “hades”. This parable is not referring to the final state those without Christ. Hades is the temporary place of punishment until Christ’s return. So Jesus is giving us a window into the present afterlife.

I want us to notice three things about life after death.

Nobody lost their identity - Lazarus is still Lazarus. The rich man is still the rich man. No one is annihilated but everyone retains their identity.

Amazingly it appears we may also have some kind of physical form. While we will not receive our resurrection bodies until the New Heavens and New Earth, the rich man knows Lazarus has the tip of his finger and he has a tongue. There may be some kind of body

There is pleasure and pain - Lazarus is comforted. He experiences pleasure and the companionship of Abraham (and probably others). The rich man is in agony and is experiencing isolation. This destroys Huckleberry Finn’s idea that he would rather be in hell because at least he would be with Tom Sawyer. Hell is isolation.

There is a great chasm that can not be crossed - Notice there is a great chasm between Lazarus and the rich man than can not be crossed. Apparently those in hades can see what they are missing. One thing those in

hades wish they could do is warn those on earth about what awaits them but they can't, there is no second chance. Hades is filled with missionaries who will never have a chance to go because it is too late.

The present heaven a place of comfort and companionship, one of the things those in the present heaven do is watch us on planet earth.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1

The writer of Hebrews is calling to his audience's mind a mental picture of the Greek and Roman competitions. The situation is similar to a professional football game. The throngs of fans are intently watching what is happening on the field. The saints who have gone before us on the playing field of life are now watching us and cheering for us from the present heaven. You want to know what brings this crowd of saints watching us to a standing ovation?

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent...In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:7+10

Notice, it did not say the angels are doing the rejoicing, the rejoicing is taking place in the presence of the angels. Who do you think is doing the rejoicing?

What will life be like in the new heavens and earth?

Skipping over debates on the rapture and the millennium, Revelation 21-22 tells us the climax of God's plans where we will live forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah 65:17

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:13

God's plan is not to just take us to the present heaven but to bring us to the new heaven and the new earth. God could just destroy this original creation, but he won't do that. God did not renounce his claim on what he made. He isn't going to abandon his creation, he is going to restore it. We won't go to heaven and forever leave earth behind. Revelation 21-22 says God will bring Heaven and Earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation.

Hebrews is teaching us that what Christ did is bigger than our imagination. Christ didn't just die so that mankind will be restored to God. He died so the earth, the universe would forever have the curse of sin removed from it.

...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:21

God is the ultimate salvation artist. He loves to restore things to their original condition but in the process of doing it he makes them even better than they were before. That is what God is doing for us through Christ. He restored our relationship with God but in the process of he sets us on a path through Christ where we will become so much more than Adam and Eve every were. The new heaven and the new earth follow the same path. They are the current heaven and earth completely remade without sin and better than our current heaven and earth ever could be.

...must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets Acts 3:21

God will eventually restore *everything*, not just us. God will restore us to what we once were, fully embodied beings and he will restore the entire physical

universe. God will not throw away his handiwork and start from scratch - instead, he uses the same canvas to repair and make more beautiful the painting marred by the vandal. The vandal doesn't get the satisfaction of destroying his rival's masterpiece. On the contrary, God makes an even greater masterpiece out of what his enemy sought to destroy. To affirm anything less is to not believe the Scriptures.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Ephesians 1:9-10

Just as the wall of sin that separated God and mankind was torn down in Jesus, so too the wall that separates Heaven and Earth will be forever demolished with the new heavens and earth. Christ will become the unchallenged, absolute ruler of the universe and redeemed humans will be God's unchallenged, delegated rulers of the New Earth. God and humanity will live together forever deepening their friendships.

What will we do?

The new heaven and new earth will be an eternity of life similar to life of this earth, but without any of the affects of sin upon our body, our relationships and upon our world. The new heaven, new earth, and our new bodies will be similar to what we have now, free from sin and vastly improved. This of eternity like a major upgrade to your computer software. Is it the same computer software, yes, but it is bug free and vastly improved.

Will we play golf in eternity I expect to. For those of you who love football, with your redeemed bodies, you will be healthy enough to play it, not just

watch it. For those of you who like coffee, expect to drink it. Doctors, you will not be needed, but we will we have enjoyable satisfying work. Think of everything the way it is supposed to be, only better. That is God's plan for us as we dwell together with him for eternity.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis portrays the White Witch, who parallels the devil, as having a hold on Narnia that makes that world “*always winter, but never Christmas.*” Those loyal to Aslan, though they've never seen him, eagerly await his appearing, for only he can make the world right again by assuming his role as rightful king.

It was not just the individuals of Narnia who needed Aslan to come, it was the entire world of Narnia that needed him. Aslan is the son of the great Emperor beyond the Sea. Yet he delegated the responsibility of ruling Narnia to the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve: Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy. They are the rulers of Narnia. Likewise, God intends for *us*, sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, to be the rulers of his New Earth, which he will powerfully delivers from its always-winter-never-Christmas curse.

Conclusion

What lies just one breath away for the follower of Christ? Instantly ushering into the presence of God in the angelic realm. While life there is active, we won't stay there. God will give us incorruptible bodies to live on an incorruptible and perfected earth with Christ as the head over everything. In that very physical creation, there will be learning, sports, cities, civilization and culture, as son's of Adam and daughter of Eve, he will give us the right to rule it

under his authority for eternity to us. It is a mind blowing incredible future that awaits each one of us, just around the bend.

In 1952 young Florence Chadwick stepped into the water of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. She had already been their first woman to swim the English channel, both ways. The weather was foggy and she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam for 15 hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water the boats accompanying her urged her to continue because she was so close. Exhausted and with no land in sight because of the fog, she stopped swimming and was pulled from the water. Once on the boat, the sun broke through and the fog began to lift. She realize her mistake, the mainland was only ½ mile away. In her own word, “If I had just seen the shore, I would have made it”.

Perhaps this morning, you can identify with Florence Chadwick. Life is tough, you are weary and it looks like life will only get worse, not better.

I hope that for the last 30 minutes the fog was lifted. As brothers and sisters in Christ, you could see the amazingly beautiful shore that awaits us and is only one breath away.



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