

Heaven, Hell, Principalities & Powers

Andrew Kitcatt | 2nd November 2025

Good morning everyone, and I certainly hope it will be this morning, because if I succeed in conveying what I believe the Lord wants us to hear together this morning, as revealed in the Bible that he's given all of us to read, you should leave this morning a) knowing exactly what your purpose in life is, and b) what you've got to look forward to if you are a Christian. And I pray we will get something of the awe and wonder of our future, and have that change our lives. And I'm sure you'll all appreciate that that is putting a lot of pressure on the next 20 minutes or so but I genuinely believe what I've just said is right, even if I don't convey it as I should. You'll have to forgive me because there is a lot to cover. This is a subject that really ought to solve all of the world's problems. Every desire for good things, for beautiful things, for understanding who our God is can be met when talking about Heaven. In order to capture what Heaven is like, we've got to ask the question: "what does it take to be God?" And that might seem a bit strange, but all of our friends and family who have gone before us, who were Christians and knew, had faith in, cherished the love of God, did for the very reason that they are in Heaven now. What is that? It's that they are 'seeing' God. Face to face. And I want us to see why it is that hope changes everything.

And you'll notice that this Tenant includes the word 'Hell'. I want us to be reassured, we're not going to spend a lot of time on it and please believe me when I say we're not going to chicken out of this this morning because I appreciate it's not always comfortable to talk about. But I believe I can guarantee you that it is SO much more important and necessary to get what Heaven is about. I bet if you're a Christian here, you probably will only desire a sermon on Hell because we get anxious about whether our friends who are exploring Christianity might ask about it, and then we get tongue-tied.

But I guarantee you, you are *far* better off getting, or understanding, Heaven. As I say, when we talk about Heaven, we're talking about your purpose for existing, the reason you were born. Humanity's purpose caught up in one single aim – "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." So, why do I start with 'good morning?' because I'm going to be talking a *lot* about God.

Let's make a start – Hell

So, I've only got 20 minutes, and in that time I have to explain and unpack 'Hell'. And the problem of Hell is classic, and I feel this particularly. Because I arrived to study Theology at Exeter with an NIV translation in my hand, and I left clutching a KJV. Not because it's better or anything – it's just when you're thinking about bible translations and which one to pick, my advice is go for the one whose problems you can stomach most. Because every translation has them. But they all seem to do this, and the KJV is particularly guilty, of using the word 'hell' to translate completely different words.

This forces me to explain that in the Old Testament, there are places called Sheol and Tehom. And then explain that Sheol is for people and Tehom is for evil spirits (who got imprisoned there right at the start of the Bible, which we can read about in 2 Peter 2:4). And in the New Testament these have Greek names. Sheol (ḥayyā) is Hades (ᾗδης) and Tehom has 'the Abyss' (ἄβυσσος) or Tartarus (τάρταρος).

Here's a really short timeline, which I have to thank a good personal friend of mine for. Before the cross, everyone goes to Sheol. So if you've ever wandered, how did people go to heaven before Jesus?" - they didn't (apart from I think a *very* few special exceptions, like Elijah in 2 Kings). And then Jesus comes along and says, to the thief on the cross: "before the day is out, you will be with me in Paradise". There's a new option on the table. Sheol is not the only option anymore, for people who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, which we talked about a couple of weeks ago when we talked about salvation by grace through faith.

But today Sheol and Tehom still exist. They don't get destroyed until right at the very end of the Bible, along with all evil principalities and powers, the devil, and those people who would seek to bring the world to ruin. It's chucked into a 'lake of fire' and presumably destroyed. Jesus called the lake of fire "Gehenna" which in his day was an actual place, a scrap heap in his time. In previous times sacrifices were held there to gods that should not have been worshipped (which we can read about in 2 Kings 23:10).

And when we read about Gehenna at the end of the Bible, that's it, that's the end of the story for anything and everything bad, wicked, evil, unjust.

Okay – that's all I'm going to say about Hell, because I reckon I've chucked a lot there, and I imagine some of you are confused. But I just haven't got time to go further. Talk to me afterwards, please. I want to talk about this, but I *really* want to talk about Heaven. But I will say this when we talk about Heaven, I hope you will find it an absolute crime that fear of all this stuff can be sold as the *main* reason to become a Christian. "You better be a Christian, or else...". Without having any clue what 'Heaven' is all about - "it doesn't matter what Heaven is like, just know that it ain't Hell." It should at least be the other way around - "it doesn't matter what Hell is like, it sure ain't Heaven."

Heaven

And the Heaven their often sold is so wet – and I want to say that when it comes comparing the Tenets around Heaven and Hell, I feel like saying like Crocodile Dundee "*ha, that's not a Tenet... THIS is a Tenet*". Heaven, as a Tenet to hold on to, is beyond beautiful and I'll tell you why.

You know when I said that at the very end of the Bible, all of evil is cast away, it's gets chucked into a fiery lake. In our reading we read: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4). And end to wickedness, an end to war, pain, inequality, division, an end to taxes, overpriced coffee, the offside rule. Okay I jest, at the last bits there, but it's an

end to all things that can make life seem absolutely intolerable. 'Evil' doesn't get away with it, which is in itself confirmation of a side-Tenet that the church has held - God is *good*, or in church speak he is 'self-excellent'. The *summum bonum*. To quote Anglican Theologian Matthew Barrett: "God is independently holy (self-excellent), then it is fitting to say this God *is* holy. Holiness is not something someone gives to him, nor is it a quality he acquires over time (which would undermine his immutability). He is holy in and of himself. His essence is, by definition, holy. It always has been, it always will be. Our God is *eternally, immutably* holy." A Tenet obviously worthy of it's own sermon.

But back to God removing all evil, it's so important - we *need* to understand what all this bad stuff is being replaced by. And what it's being replaced by is the reason we all exist. It is the meaning of our lives. And I'm going to set. This up by giving us two perspectives on Heaven that, whilst being nice, fall so far short of what's really going on.

Falling from the Heavens

When you think of Heaven, I bet we've probably heard of it as something like this. I'm sure we've seen the fluffy clouds and the angels playing on the harps. Or on the other hand, it's a lot like earth, only better. The more I've come to know God throughout my life, the more, I must confess, irritated I get about it. Especially the second one.

That error, is to think of Heaven as basically an updated earth. Earth 2 as it were. It's very materialistic. That Heaven is basically all the best bits of earth, but bigger and more of it. We like peace, so there is more of that. We like food, so there's a banquet. We like not feeling pain, or mourning, or crying, so all of that is done away with for good. The sunsets are richer, the water is sweeter, the weather is always fine.

The Beatific Vision – Truly, truly Heaven.

And yes of course Heaven will have all of that good stuff, which we've just read about - Revelation 21:4 - "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4). We also get a description of a "sea of glass" in Revelation 4:6. But the point I'm going to focus on before closing is this – that's *not* Heaven. It's a part of Heaven, but not Heaven itself. I don't know if you've ever wondered "will I get bored in Heaven?" I think if this is our view of Heaven, then I think the answer is "yes". Eternity in a better earth, I would eventually get bored. And if we're honest we all would.

And remember how I mentioned that Heaven has to do with your life's purpose. The purpose of your life is not to experience eternal peace, to never cry again, or to mourn again, as wonderful as that sounds.

What makes Heaven, Heaven? Let's go back a verse, Revelation 21:3 - "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and **he will dwell with them**. They will be his people, and God **himself will be with them** and be their God."

What's Heaven about? It's God. Nothing more, nothing less. This is what I want us to understand, Heaven is not like a better earth, it's the best thing ever, because we get to gaze upon God! And this is the Tenet we *have* to hold to: our very purpose for being here now and there in the future is to gaze upon God, glorify Him and enjoy Him.

And so we need to talk about Him, we need to begin to get what makes God, God. What does it take to be God?

I'm going to turn to an old friend of the church, a monk called Anselm of Canterbury. Working with his Bible and the church fathers before him, he described God in a sentence - "God is a being than which none greater can be imagined." He and Christians before him understood that God is the greatest thing that can ever be conceived. He is the greatest great thing ever. Nothing compares with his greatness, his excellency, his glory. It's the highest of all highs, the greatest of all greats, the best of the best.

At one of the most remarkable points in the Old Testament, Moses, who is on an absolute roll with God. He's experiencing a level of intimacy with God that only Adam and Eve had had before in the garden in Eden. After a really intimate conversation between them, in Exodus 33:17 God says to Moses "I am pleased with you and I know you by name." And after this, Moses makes the *ultimate* request.

After all he's experienced, what is the ultimate, final high with God. How could he get any higher with his experience with God? Verse 18 "Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."" And God says "No." Because his glory is so excellent, Moses would just be obliterated. But in his mercy, he hides Moses in a cleft in the rock and shows Moses his back.

We might learn from the transfiguration of Jesus – Matthew 17:2 we read that Jesus "...was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." And what does Peter his disciple ask for? He says, "I know that this is a good thing, but please let me put up three shelters." There is a *reason* he asks for this. He's not just asking to put them up in accommodation and hope they stay. He knows what's going on – up a mountain, great white light. Sounds an awful lot like Moses - He's fearing for his life. But Jesus gets covered in a cloud instead.

And it's because of the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we will get to gaze upon God. This Tenet is called the Beatific Vision, the "blessed vision", and my prayer is that this would become a great part of our theological diet. When we are in Heaven, we get to experience something not even Adam and Eve had in the Garden in Eden. We get access to something that was denied Moses. 1 Corinthians 13:12 put it like this - "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

God is infinitely great, infinitely beautiful, infinitely perfect. Christians like Augustine have put this way: God is *incomprehensible*. There is no end to understanding and exploring Him. Which makes sense, because if you could fully understand God, if you get to the end of comprehending him, then he would be limited, and therefore you could think of something better than God. I'm going to paraphrase *Samuel Parkison* from the Credo podcast here, he wrote a book called "To Gaze Upon God". Read it. "The beatific vision does not bring an end to God's incomprehensibility...our capacity grows with our enjoyment of God. That process never ceases. We will never cease to be finite, and the object of our delight never ceases to be infinite. Unending, growing capacity for enjoyment of God, that will never end. With your new eyes that you can't fathom, with a sight you can't fathom, with all infinity to see God, you will never get to the bottom of God."

One way this changes our lives now, is that if you've ever wondered "what's my purpose in life?" I'm going to save you some time - *this* is the purpose of your life. And do you know how I know? Because to do otherwise, would be to settle for less. And we know this instinctively: nothing on earth satisfies forever. All our desire is ultimately insatiable, and so no experience of trying to satiate the desire with any desire in this world, because the truest object of our desire is infinite. We can have it all and still desire more. Our desires for

beauty, can only end with the best thing, and that's God. He gives us Himself, the greatest thing ever.

And if you want just one way that this can change your day-to-day life, think about prayer. If we get that prayer is us talking with the ultimate object of our desire, we start to pray like David and the Psalmists.

Psalm 73:25

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 42:1-2

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

So to finish – let's pray like this. The Beatific Vision is your goal, your destiny. Don't gaze anywhere else. Let's not settle for less – let's enjoy God.