

Heaven was on Earth in the Resurrection of Jesus (Pt 2)

The Grave Is Not a Dead End but a Gate to a Life without End

SUBJECT: The theology of human destiny (25)

Introduction: The resurrection of Jesus gives us a glimpse of ‘heaven’ on earth, howbeit in a sketchy way. Nonetheless, in the accounts of the Gospels during His post-resurrection ministry among His disciples gives us significant pointers as to the nature of life in the future heavenly order. **What then, can we deduce from the post resurrection life of the Lord as far as our heavenly life is concerned?**

II. The Nature of Heaven

1. The Heavenly Life Is a Personal life.

- a. The Gospel writers make it clear in their records that the risen Jesus is clearly the same person as the one prior to His resurrection.
 - i. Jesus, whose words and deeds recorded in **John** chapters **1 - 19** is the same person described in **John** chapters **20 - 21**.
 - ii. John conveys that he is the very same person who had hung upon the cross at the conclusion of His years of association with them is the very one who now stands before them, by referring to Jesus showing His disciples ‘*His hands and His side*’ (**Jn 20: 20**).
 - iii. Luke makes the same point more directly by quoting Jesus’ words, “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (**24: 39**).
- b. John also recorded this continuity of Jesus’ personhood after the resurrection, in the moving encounters with Mary (**20: 10-18**), Thomas (**20: 24-29**) and Peter (**21: 15-22**). In each case Jesus draws upon His previous knowledge and familiarity of them.
 - i. In Mary’s case, Jesus movingly calls her by name, “*Mary!*” (**20: 16**), reflecting a profound relationship of mutual understanding and knowledge of one another.
 - ii. In Thomas’s case, Jesus recites back to him his very condition, proof, to belief – “*reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side...*” (**20: 27, 28**). The unmistakable physical presence of Jesus before him evoked this powerful statement of confirmation, “*My Lord and my God!*” The personal “*my*” reflecting the assured confidence that the one before him is no other than the same Jesus he knew and followed during his years as a disciple.

- iii. In Peter's case, the interaction in **21: 15-17** draws directly on Peter's earlier pledge of failed loyalty (**Mk 14: 29; Jn 13: 37**), and hence it makes sense in terms of the continuity of Jesus as the same person post resurrection, now restoring and calling Peter to love Him, followed by Peter's heartfelt comment, "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*" (**21: 17**).
- iv. We can therefore conclude with conviction that life in the heavenly order in the new worlds will preserve our personhood. All human deformities will be eliminated and physically perfected with the continuity of our personal identity (cf. **Isa 35; Rev 21: 3, 4**). The person for whom Jesus died for and rose for, *that self* will endure into eternity. We ourselves, not another, will behold the face of our Savior and share the life of heaven. Our personhood is immortal.

2. The Heavenly Life Will Be an Embodied Life.

- a. All the Gospel writers stress, that the tomb of Jesus was emptied by His resurrection. No Jew would have embraced a claim to authentic resurrection which did not involve a bodily resurrection. A bodily resurrection represents a true victory over the fallen nature of man. And it would be one in which the physical as well as spiritual processes of decay were overcome.
- b. Jesus Himself draws attention to the physical nature of His resurrection to His disciples by showing the scars of His wounds still visible in His body. This again is seen in His eating a meal with the disciples (**Lk 24: 41-43**). He wanted them to grasp that this is not a '*spirit-appearance*', but the utterly unprecedented, unique, world-transforming, heaven-anticipating, sovereign action of the Creator in the first installment of remaking the world. So the embodied nature of Jesus at resurrection is critical to reality of the redeemed body in the new earth.
- c. Jesus showed His disciples what it is to be like, embodied in the resurrected life. Jesus said, "*Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*" (**Lk 24: 39; cf. Jn 20: 20, 27**).
- d. There will be differences as well as sameness, discontinuity as well as continuity – thankfully necessarily so.
- e. Sin will be no more and hence all the destructive and limiting powers of sin and its attendant physical corruption are also no more. *We will rise to a new life in the new body and live in a new world!*

3. The Heavenly Life Is a Liberated Life.

- a. In the glimpses of His life after His resurrection we find that at the physical level He can appear, disappear and reappear at will. *How is that for traveling in the new world? We too can anticipate, on the model of Jesus' post resurrection ministry, a new openness to the 'material' world with new possibilities of its energies and forces open to our direction.*

- b. At the moral and spiritual level the risen Jesus was free from the awful burden of responsibility for the completion of His mission to save mankind from Adamic damnation. Some of the freedoms are the ones that Jesus never required – the freedom from a fallen nature, and freedom from the guilt of sin. *His 'Peace' will rule our lives without stress, sin-guilt and depression in the new life in a new earth.*
- c. At the relational level Jesus had a new freedom to indwell and personally identify with all who belong to Him. *Redeemed mankind will experience a loving unity and harmony bound in Jesus. On the basis of the Gospel evidence we can also anticipate wonderful new possibilities in mutual relationships, as we set free to love as never before.*
- d. Implicit in that lies a new partnership and harmony with the natural order liberated from 'the bondage to corruption' (Rom 8: 21). Redeemed man and nature will live in perfect harmony (cf. Isa 11, 12; Rev 22: 1-5).
- e. *Freedom awaits, and beckons us and we will be free at last from sin and its corruption!*

4. The Heavenly Life is a Fulfilled Life

- a. 'Peace' is the first word of greeting in the upper room in the evening of His resurrection (Jn 20: 19). This Hebrew word holds significant meanings for the resurrected life. 'Shalom' means **wholeness or completeness**, and embraces the blessings of righteousness, justice, joy, peace and everything good from the hand of God.
- b. 'Shalom' implies spiritual perfection, and **the complete fulfillment of our lives** as the redeemed of God. It is a promise that all the potential of our lives here will at last be released to what God intended us to be. *That is heaven!*

In Summary, Heaven Is Shown To Be:

1. It will be a personal life in which our individual identity will be preserved;
2. It will be an embodied life with a continued, albeit renewed reality;
3. It will be a life of glorious freedoms;
4. It will be a fulfilled life in which all our potential will find complete and satisfying expression forever.

Conclusion:

The life of Jesus experienced during the unique forty days after His resurrection is a real expression of the life of heaven within earthly parameters. The presence of the resurrected Lord during the forty days is to teach us to anticipate a heavenly life within the terms of this earthly life given by the Creator at the beginning in Eden. But only recreated, renewed and refurbished finding glorious expression and experience in a new heaven and earth.

This new life of heaven in a new earth is no wishful thinking or idle dream. God has come to us in Jesus; He will come again in Jesus. At His coming the glory of heaven will dawn upon us. Heaven is coming and it is as certain as the empty tomb of the Lord, Christ Jesus!