



## The New Heavens and the New Earth

### Theology on Fire Part 20

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7/29/18

The message this morning is “The New Heavens and the New Earth.” Many times we talk about heaven, and we have different concepts. A couple weeks ago I spoke about hell—[“Three Things Jesus Said about Hell”](#)—and to properly appreciate heaven, you have to understand what the other side of that equation is. So go back and listen to that if you need to.

But this morning we’re going to talk about the new heavens and the new earth. We’re in a series called “Theology on Fire.” This is part 20. I believe we’ll be ending it today. And whether you’re young or old, whether you live in America or any other continent, I believe that God has stamped eternity on our hearts. Ecclesiastes talks about this as well. He has stamped eternity on our hearts. We have eternity written on our hearts. That’s why people know there’s a clock ticking. There’s an alarm clock coming that’s going to sound the alarm. People know, and you’ll see as the days continue, that evil increases. We know that there is eternity coming. We were created to understand certain things about God because we were created in God’s image.

So this morning we’re going to try to answer a few questions:

1. What is heaven?
2. Is it a place?
3. How will the earth be renewed?
4. What will it be like to live in the new heavens and the new earth?

Let me tell you up front that there is a lot of speculation. All we can go off of is what the Bible says. In other words, the Bible gives us the meat, and a lot of people like to add the lettuce and the ketchup and the buns and make a hamburger and present it. I’ve had people argue things about it, and I have to say, “I don’t know. The Bible’s not really clear, is it?” We just know certain things, especially, for example, end-times theology—eschatology, the study of end times. We can put certain pieces together, but we’re really not going to know the full picture until Jesus returns. And then it all begins to make sense.

And I’m actually pulling a lot of this out of Wayne Grudem’s book on [Systematic Theology](#). You can cross-reference that if you want a good study on this from Wayne Grudem. A lot of these points came from there. Also, Randy Acorn has a good book on heaven, explaining a lot about heaven and what it’s about.

But let me just pull from the Bible. We know this: “We will live eternally with God in the new heavens and the new earth. After the final judgment, believers enter into the full enjoyment of life in God’s presence forever” (Grudem; see also Matt. 25:34; Rev. 22:3). (And I’ve got all these verses if you need them. They’ll be under our sermon notes under the audio version of this message. That’s where you can find those.)

We do know that—we will live eternally with God in the new heavens and the new earth. Now the question comes up—“Ok, that’s great if you believe the Bible. But how do we know the Bible is accurate?” Well, in case you haven’t been here before, I talk about the reliability of the Bible often. Historically, it’s right on the money—prophetically, archaeologically, scientifically. Written over fifteen hundred years by forty different authors saying the same thing, the same tone, the same theme. And as a person who just finished a book, and having my mom help me in the editing process, we can agree on that—two people writing on the same thing.

So we have this book written over fifteen hundred years, forty different authors, no inconsistencies—I’ve still thrown out that challenge to my atheist friends to show me one spot in the Bible where it is off scientifically. We know the accuracy of the Bible; that’s why we call it the *inerrancy of Scripture*. It is reliable. That’s where we get our source of information. Unlike other books out there that are not reliable, this one has stood the test of time. And again, in all those areas, we know that it is true.

Not only that, it ministers to your own heart, doesn’t it? It’s a testimony to your own heart. It confirms different things.

So what is heaven? Well, heaven is the place where God fully makes known His presence. And what we don’t know is, where is it? Is it out past Jupiter or in a different galaxy? We know that God is spirit, and He lives outside of time, and it might be a different type of dimensional aspect. We just don’t know. But we do know that it is a place, from what the Bible says, and God’s presence will be evident (Isa. 66:1; 1 Peter 3:22; Matt. 6:9). But let me read one of those:

[Jesus] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (1 Peter 3:22)

Remember the right hand is a position of authority and power. God has given Jesus all authority and all power. That’s why the demonic realm hates Him. That’s why at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord because God has established this.

So Jesus has gone into heaven, wherever that might be, and is at the right hand of God. “Angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”—everything sits under Christ’s dominion. That’s why we don’t fear the powers of darkness. That’s why we don’t fear Satan to a certain degree

because God has already conquered hell, death, sin, and the grave. Our Lord, our Savior, is the final authority in all these matters.

So you seek Him. Stay close to the Shepherd. That's how you avoid Satan. You stay really close to the Shepherd, and that coyote won't get you. "Heaven is a place, not just a state of mind" (Grudem). I think that's good to clarify because sometimes we think, "Well, it's a state of mind." Well, according to the Bible (Acts 1:11; 7:55–56; John 14:3) heaven is a place. John 14:3, Jesus said:

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.

Jesus is saying, "I am going to prepare a place for you." Again, we don't know exactly what that is. Will there need to be a bed? Mansions are talked about as well as beds. We don't know exactly, but we do know that Jesus is going to prepare a place, and He will come again. This is one area or one reason why we get the doctrine of the immediate returning of Jesus Christ. Most in the church believe that Jesus Christ can come at any moment for His church. Some will say, "No, certain things need to happen," but we've always, even two thousand years ago, believed in Christ returning at any moment, at any time. We just don't know.

He says, "I will come again, and you can take that to the bank." That's surer than Wells Fargo, that's surer than your stocks, that's surer than your 401K, and that's a lot surer than our retirement under Social Security and the health care plans and different things. When He says, "I will come again," take it to the bank. It's done; it's been solidified.

The physical creation will be renewed and will continue to exist. So that's an interesting thing. I've got eight different Scripture verses here from Hebrews to 2 Peter to Revelation (Rom. 8:19-21; Heb. 1:11-12; 12:26-27; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 20:11; 21:1), but the physical creation, what God created, will be renewed and will continue to exist. There are different thoughts on that. I believe that God has already created everything that's going to be created. He spoke it into existence. Some disagree. But there won't be an evaporation of everything and a renewal of earth, there could be a re-creation. I'm going to explain that in a minute.

Romans 8:19: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." Even creation is groaning, it's waiting, for Jesus return to fix everything.

For the creation was subjected to futility (meaning, we were under the curse of sin and death), not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (vv. 20–21).

Even the creation, even earth, was affected by the fall. Even how God created things. The atmosphere was damaged because of the fall. So creation is waiting.

I like what 2 Peter 3:10 says (we're reading a lot of Scripture today; I hope that's ok): "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."

It does beg the question: Are you ready? Are you ready, because when the Lord comes, it's going to be like a thief, meaning, without expectancy. We are expecting, but we don't know; it could come at any time. Is the person ready for His return?

In which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness. (vv. 10–11)

So it's a good reminder. Jesus is coming again, therefore, what kind of persons should we be? Everything we're building, everything we're buying will be vaporized. So what kind of person should we be?

And this time of summer I'm often reminded, right? We've got the guy down the street with his brand-new three hundred-thousand-dollar motor home. Then he's got his jet skis being pulled by that. Then he's got his boat sitting in the garage. And then he's working and working and working, and he gets at the end of his life, and he realizes, "I've lost my family. I don't even know the Lord." See, the futility, the brevity of life, a focusing on the wrong things. And when you focus on those things it's not fulfilling, is it? If you've been there, you know it. The more you own, actually the more owns you. So what manner of people ought we to be in godliness?

Now those who are convicted are going to leave here and say, "Shane said I couldn't ride a jet ski." No, no. I do whenever I get a chance, but *I ran it, here's your hundred dollars, thank you*. I don't have to worry about registration. I don't have to buy it. I don't have to haul a trailer around. I'm just saying don't take this out of context. Just put things in perspective. Do they have a hold on you, or can you let them go? Are they controlling you, or can you let them go? Does it truly *own* you?

That's what he's saying here. All of this is going to go away. And isn't it interesting that you see people, years and years and years and into their dream house, and then they die a couple years later. Their whole life was invested into these things.

"Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (v. 12). We should be looking for it and preparing for it.

Because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (vv. 12–13)

So again, quoting Wayne Grudem: "The earth may be changed and renewed. It's difficult to think that God would annihilate His original creation as this seems to give the devil the last word by scrapping what was originally 'very good.'"

So his point here, which I don't tend to disagree with, is it's not like God's going to go, "Ok, the devil ruined all of this. I've got to get rid of everything. I've got to start over again." He might renew and restore the damage and rebuild the heavens and the earth and not completely evaporate it, annihilate it, and come up with a brand-new creation.

Now people can say, "I don't agree with that." That's fine. We don't know. I just know I don't want to be around, facing judgment, when everything is evaporating, everything's being burned with fire. We just don't know, but we do know that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. "Passages may simply refer to the burning up of some of the things on the earth in its present form, not its very existence" (Grudem).

So does it mean God is going to evaporate earth and then start over? Or is He going to re-create or restructure and renew? Well, that's up to you to ponder. But we do know there will be a renewing, a restoring.

"Our resurrection bodies will be part of the renewed creation" (Grudem). So let's listen to 2 Corinthians 5:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. (vv. 1–2)

So if you're a real believer, you know exactly what he's talking about. Some of us don't want to go just yet. You know, we've got work to do, and we're going to miss people, but we've got this other side of us that's like, "Get me out of here as quickly as possible. I'm groaning"—especially as you get older—"This is hurting, and this is hurting, my teeth are hurting. Get me out of this tent. It is perishing. I'm groaning for this new body."

And then verse 5:

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. (vv. 5–6)

So believers are given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of this place in heaven, therefore we're always confident, knowing that God is going to end the story well. "For we walk by faith, not by sight. (v. 7)" There's where that old saying comes from—it's in the Bible. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Let me encourage you this morning. This is easy to say but hard to do sometimes, isn't it? People tell you, "Just walk by faith, brother." "Well, why don't you go through what I'm going through, and then you try that on yourself?" It's really true—although that's not the right attitude to have, but that's how the flesh sometimes thinks. But that's how we're supposed to walk: *I trust God's promises. I'm stepping out on who He said He is. I know there's a heaven. I know there's a new earth. I know God's going to redeem and set me free. I'm walking by faith in that.*

And if you don't feel really confident in this area, it's probably because you don't spend a lot of time in His Word. Because when you spend time in His Word, you build the relationship, and when the relationship is built, you're not afraid of death as much. I think there is in a lot of people this uncertainty. I'll just tell you up front, I'm not excited about it all the time. There's uncertainty. I wouldn't call it doubt, but I would say I don't know what's on the other side—mainly, pain, right? I don't know how much pain this is going to cause me. There's a little uncertainty, but *God, help my unbelief. Lord, I don't doubt You, and I'm sure as the sun is going to come up, but Lord, help that little bit of doubt coming up.* See, it's part of that sinful nature.

I want to encourage you that it's ok to be a little uncertain about or worried about or fearful about it—understanding that the flesh is trying to knock you off course. And that will often happen before somebody is going to die. Maybe they've got a certain amount of time, and they will struggle with this. They will be like, "Ok, I'm excited. I can't wait to meet the Lord," but then two hours later this fear comes in. "I wish I would have spent more time with my kids. Had I known..." and so that's normal for the Christian, that some of them will go back and forth, and they will be joy-filled and then tear-filled hours later because it's part of that Adamic nature, that nature of Adam that still has that sinful hold on us.

What manner of persons ought we to be according to His promise, walking by faith and not by sight? And then, let me just read more from Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 15:42. And I did something I don't do too often—I used the NLT, the New Living Translation. It's more of a paraphrase. I wouldn't use it as a study Bible. I don't recommend it as a Bible, but if you have it, you're not going to hell. It's a paraphrase. If I said, "Hey, here's this new Bible, guys. I wrote it; it's my thoughts," don't use that as the Bible. That's just my paraphrasing. It's actually what I do during sermons—I paraphrase. And you look at the source to confirm it if you need to. But it's a good paraphrase on this:

It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. (vv. 42–43)

So you have this image of dying and brokenness, meaning we're broken, we're shattered. The body is decaying. It's going back to the earth where it was created. But then he says we will be raised in glory.

They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. (v. 43–44)

It's a good reminder that this is an earthly tent. We take care of this earthly tent because it's all we have on this side of heaven. This is how we do ministry, this is how we live, this is how we function. And I found that the better you take care of your body, the better you will feel. So when we struggle with serotonin, dopamine levels, anxiety, depression—all these different things—the better you take care of the tent the way God designed it, the better you will feel, and the more productive you will be.



Here's a question: "What good will it do to have a body in heaven?" (Grudem) Because we have this image of just floating around on clouds on all day, like laying out by the pool. I actually had somebody tell me years ago, "I don't want to go to heaven and just worship all day. What, we're going to worship for eternity and just sit in pews?" Well, let's think this through for a minute. Again, Wayne Grudem: "Most of our enjoyment of what God has made involves our physical bodies."

There will be a resurrected body. In my opinion, I see the body being active. If a person enjoyed painting or singing or music, we might be able to share those same things or participate in those things in heaven.

I mean, I just know it's going to be a lot better than here, so I'm not really worried about it. We're going to be doing things:

In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be a place and activities for our resurrection bodies, which will never grow old or become weak or ill. There is nothing inherently "unspiritual" about the physical world that God made and called "very good" (Gen. 1:31). . . . We will eat and drink at "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). . . . The "river of the water of life" will flow "from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city" (Rev. 22:1) (unless you think all this is allegory). The tree of life will bear "twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month" (Rev. 22:2). (Grudem)

Is that still coming? Isn't it interesting there's going to be a tree? God created fruit when creation was perfect, and—I've talked about it before—that fruit gives life (there must be something there that gives life), sustaining the body, then the fall comes. The DNA, whatever happens, our bodies are now corrupted by sin because of taking that fruit, and now again, we're going to go back to this place of having fruit to eat. I know that's not good news for you junk-food junkies, but it is good news.

"Music is prominent in descriptions of heaven, so it is possible both musical and artistic activities will be done to the glory of God" (Grudem). And I love seeing this picture. I've seen it so many times; you probably have too. I think it's a on a gravestone, out in a graveyard. It has a wheelchair and a boy, standing up, reaching up to heaven, like his whole body will be restored and renewed. It's so encouraging. Because this isn't fluff, this isn't pie in the sky, this is doctrinal truth, that Jesus is coming again, that there will be a place where we spend eternity with Him.

God is infinite, and we are finite, correct? We are finite, which means we don't know that much. People think they know so much, but we don't know anything compared to everything there is to know. Many believe that we will spend eternity learning more about God, learning more about creation.

"Though the New Jerusalem will never experience night, the book of Revelation relates many actions that involve a sequence of events (Rev. 21:24–26; 22:2)" (Grudem). So there could be a sequence of events. Even though we don't live in the time element (we're not subject to time), there could be sequence of events. "The doctrine of the new creation provides a great motivation for storing up treasures in heaven

rather than on earth (Matt 6:19-21)” (Grudem). You’ve heard that before, right? Store up your treasures in heaven, not on earth.

This doctrine of new creation—can you imagine heaven for eternity? And we get so focused on the here and now. The Bible describes your life and my life as a vapor, as a dash on a tombstone. That’s our life. Yet we focus so much, laying up treasures here that will be burned, that won’t amount to anything. There have actually been studies (I think it’s good to leave people things) where millionaires have left their kids their fortune, and it destroys them because they’ve never worked hard. They don’t know what it is to appreciate things. And they lay up, and they lay up, and they work, and they work, and they don’t go to heaven, and they leave this wealth of riches, and we know it’s hard for a rich man to get into heaven, and it leads their family astray.

So where are our treasures? Where is our heart? Matthew 6:19—21:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now a couple things happen when we hear this verse. We immediately check out, like, “Well, that’s not going to happen. I’m not going to go live in a tent in a desert.” But it’s really not talking about that. It talks about, where’s your heart at? Where’s our heart at? What are our priorities? What is first in your life? Does it have spiritual value? For example, I have a house, and my neighbor has a house. I have a car; my neighbor has a car. So it’s not on that alone, but where are my priorities? Where is my heart? Where do we set aside a good portion of income to—to give to God’s work? Where is our focus—going and helping people and leading them to God? See, it’s all about priorities.

We can build up and build up and build up—like how many cars does Jay Leno have, right, or that guy, Seinfeld? Their garages are bigger than this church. And what is the point of that? You’re laying up for yourself treasure that will perish. Rust will destroy it.

It also has to do with investments. What are you building? God’s kingdom or your own? That’s why the Bible teaches a healthy balance. I believe we are to store and save money. I believe we are to have time during the lean seasons and be glad that we invest wisely—not all the eggs in one basket. You know what that means, right? “I’m going to put all my money into Enron” (for the older folks, you know what that is). That destroyed a lot of lives. They put all their hope into this company that was cooking the books. They said, “Look at our profit, look at our this,” and lost everything. You diversify.

But also you take a good chunk—what’s a good chunk? A chunk that hurts a little because if it doesn’t cost you anything, it doesn’t mean anything to God. And you put that aside for, “Ok, Lord, what do You want me to do?” I don’t care if you sponsor children, I don’t care if you give to an evangelistic campaign and



you get the message out there, but there should be some investment into giving for the furtherance of the gospel. On this point people say, “Oh, the church just wants our money.” No, the church doesn’t want your money. We don’t need anybody’s money; we’re doing fine. But you better lay hold of that pocketbook, and you control it rather than have it control you because it’s about priorities of the heart.

I know people—firemen, policemen, those with good jobs—everything is going into their things and more things and more things. So they’re laying themselves up treasures *here*. I mean, isn’t it a little bit silly to buy and buy and buy and build and build and build, knowing it’s just gone? It will rust and evaporate. The house we love, in fifty years, might be bulldozed for a community center? Who knows?

My point is there should be a portion where you build up your treasure in heaven. How do I do that? Well, Jesus said, “If you give to the person who needs water, you’re giving to Me. If you clothe the person who needs clothing, you’re giving to Me.” So if you don’t feel confident in a church, you can give to, say, a pregnancy resource center that is stopping abortions. I’m going to speak at one in October in Washington for this very reason—to encourage people to help women that are struggling in this area. What about single moms, shelters that need to house people, the homeless? And we give a portion, or if you give to the church, the church does that as well. You give a portion of your treasure, and you’re laying up treasure in heaven.

Now I don’t think God’s going to judge us, “Well, Shane you don’t give as much as a millionaire gives, so he’s going to have many more treasures.” He looks at the ability He’s given us. If one person gives \$25 and helps a missionary on the mission field, I believe that person is going to be the same as a millionaire giving \$250,000 a year. The treasures will be the same because of the ability and because of what they’ve been given.

So that’s all it is, and people think, “Christians just want me to sell my house and go live with my mom and don’t own anything.” That’s really not what it’s about. Stewardship is taking care of your family; you’re a wise investor. When God gives you more, you give others more. It’s about stewarding the gift He’s given you. But where does your treasure lie? You know. I know. We can often do a little bit more in this area.

It really has to do with time, resources, and money. Where is our heart? This can mean simple readjustments. It doesn’t have to be big things. It can be a simple readjustment. I’ve seen people say, “You know what? I’m disconnecting Netflix and sending my ten dollars here.” Oh, it’s quiet in here. Let me pick a different one. “I’m disconnecting... *whatever*.” Or “I’m going to stop my Starbucks addition every day.” Let’s be honest—\$3 or \$4, \$120 a month? “And I’m going to stop this, God. I’m going to honor You, and I’m going to send this somewhere, or I’m going to do this.” Or you say, “Lord, show me. Where do You want me to give?”

See how it's just little readjustments? Now I'm storing up money for heaven; I'm not storing in my body partially hydrogenated oils, monosodium glutamate, aspartame, and a whole bunch of sugar I don't need and destroying the temple. Right? You're exchanging—readjustments here. People sometimes fall short because they think it's this big, "Oh, I should never have bought a house, is that what he's saying?" No, I'm not saying that. But why not buy a little bit smaller house than have extra?

I've opened up about this; I'll do it again this morning. It was a struggle, I'll just tell you up front. We bought a house four years ago, and we met with the lender, and she said, "Oh my, you can qualify for more than that."

I said, "Well, we give to the church, and we give other places."

And she said, "Well, the bank doesn't care about that stuff. They don't look at that as bills."

"I do."

"But you can qualify for more. You can go to the west side, get a big house with a pool, if you want."

"Well, no, we have to keep that in there."

"But the bank doesn't care, Shane."

"I know, but you're not listening to me."

But anyway, long story short, it's that struggle. We look at our bills, and we sponsor four kids overseas (I'm not trying to brag; I wish we could do more). I'm just saying how we lay it out and say, "Ok, we need a house payment that fits within this model of giving, building up treasure in heaven," not "Let's get the house and then fit everything in that model," and remove things that are important. It's about readjustment and prioritizing. I did fight this for a few weeks—because you drive around and see these houses, "Oh, half acre with a pool. Goodness, maybe we don't have to give anymore." You know? It's funny how the flesh loves to negotiate.

Again, it's about simple readjustments. What simple readjustments can we make in our life? Where are we spending extra money that can go to furthering the gospel? Because that's how you store up treasure in heaven. You're giving to those in need. And you be wise about this. You see some guy on TV saying, "Just send me your thousand dollars. Send me your thousand dollars this week, and I've got some oil for you." "I've got an anointed nail for you that they used in Jesus's wrists. The first thousand people that respond, I will send you..." Well, how did you get a thousand of these? Right? The con artist, the shenanigans, the "send me money for my jet"—this is baloney.

Look, and ask God for wisdom on where to give—maybe a family in need. "You know, I'm just going to send them a hundred dollars in groceries a month." "And this single mom needs my help." And you just

start to readjust a little bit, and now you're storing up things in heaven, and that adds up over the course of a lifetime, doesn't it? Go online and research. If a twenty-year-old kid starts saving a hundred dollars a month, they could be a millionaire by the time they retire. Something like that, don't quote me on the numbers, but it's such a small amount. I wish I would have known that at twenty or at eighteen. They could retire with a million dollars in savings. See, same thing in God's economy. You add. He keeps multiplying and multiplying and multiplying to what we give. "But, Shane, it's only a hundred dollars." Yeah, but God multiplies that and multiplies that and returns a hundredfold.

Are you laying up treasure in heaven? Let me just leave with this statement on this portion. Little treasure equals little joy. Those who don't store up treasure in heaven don't have a lot of joy here because a Christian was never designed to build and build and store and store and "mine, mine." That's cute with a four-year-old, but it's pathetic with a forty-four-year-old. "Mine, mine, mine," and there's little joy. There's little joy in that life. Many people, I believe, many Christians have little joy in their life because they're too worried about keeping up with the Joneses and not a lot to do with giving back to God. People say, "Shane, thank you so much for encouraging me to serve in the hospital homes. I just go once a month, but I feel so good about that. I feel great leaving there." Or, "Thank you for having me teach the kids. I left there just so fulfilled." Why? Because you were designed to give back, not just store.

So that might be a good tie-in to it—we need help in all areas of the church, ok? If you can help, you'll be joy-filled. Think about it, to just come and listen and leave and not give back, that doesn't make a lot of sense.

And then, finally, the new creation will be a place of great beauty and abundance and joy in the presence of God (Rev. 21:1–27; 22:5)" (Grudem). So I do want to leave you with this thought. Do you have that fellowship with God? Do you have that joy? Do you have that joy unspeakable? Not every day at every moment—welcome to the club—but there's a joy. "I like this sermon this week. I mean, I like them all, but this is joy-filled. Lord, this is going to be so good; am I done here?" You know? "I'm ready to see You, but I'm understanding there's work to be done."

But do you have that joy because if you don't have that joy, you don't have that fellowship. Do you truly know Him? Have you, in total abandonment, given Him everything? Have you fully surrendered your life? Because there is tremendous joy, joy you can't define, joy you can't even explain.

Let me tell you something that happened to me and Morgan this week. (I got permission from the person; they might be watching too, so if they are, our prayers are with you.) But many of you know Lanea Tolley and Sam, her husband. They used to come right here at six in the morning, the morning worship, and just a wonderful couple. And she was at the hospital, and they thought that maybe her colon was bent over, and she couldn't eat anymore. They needed to go in and fix that. I think it was Wednesday

or Thursday, and she went into surgery, and I'm texting her husband, and the text said, "I haven't told her yet, but the doctors said the cancer came back and it's concrete, around all her intestines. They give her about two months."

So we go visit her, and I'm like, "What is wrong with this person?" Joy filled! And she's just encouraging Morgan and me and building us up, and I'm like, "What is wrong with this picture?" "Thank you, thank you"—and we left encouraged. "Wait, hold on. Where does that joy come from?" She said, "Shane, you preach it; we've got to live it. The Lord has been so good to me, just building up with joy." Where does that come from? It only comes from the power of God in a person's life who's been fully surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and who has the Holy Spirit residing in them, that they can say, "I will see my Savior soon! And I have joy about that."

And I just left there shaking my head. What would you do if you heard that? Now, of course, pray for a miracle. But she said, "Pray for God's will. Just pray for God's will. And that I lead people to Him." She tells the surgeon, the nurses [about God.] It's just amazing to watch. They'll go and want to take blood, and she'll say, "Oh, don't even worry, honey. I don't need to know anything. What's the point of that? I'm going home."

See, you can't just fabricate that. You can fabricate a lot of things, can't you? "Well, let me just try to act nice around them." But this? You can't make it up. This is where the rubber meets the road. It was said of John Wesley, "His men die well," for this very reason. Because when you're filled with the Spirit of God, you're not really fearful. You're excited. You're joy-filled. You are sad for others, but you're joy-filled.

But it was so amazing to experience. I'm walking in, thinking, "What do you say?" Sometimes you don't say anything; you just listen. And just the smile on her face encourages us, and I'm like, "No, we're supposed to encourage. Not the other way around."

But see that encouragement also helped to fuel the sermon. You practice what you preach. The reason many people are worried and scared is because they don't know the Lord and Savior. Or the relationship has been damaged. They've quenched and grieved the Spirit of God, and they're still loving the things of the world, not the things of God.

So if you want that joy that is unspeakable, if you want to be ready for Christ's return, then you have to repent and believe in the gospel. Or, believers, you have to fully surrender your life. There's no mystery that she was up here at six in the morning on the altar, and now she's filled with the Spirit of God. You've got to do things to foster and build that relationship. Philippians 4:6–7 says:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

See, be anxious for nothing, but in everything in thankfulness. And I will tell you this: If you're very anxious and unsettled, you're not thankful. They can't coexist in the same heart. There's a thankfulness—be thankful for what God has done. And Isaiah 48:22 reminds us that “there is no peace for the wicked.” Maybe somebody hearing this later, maybe this applies to you, there's no peace for the wicked.

And people say, “How dare you call me wicked?” Well, let's define it. It's a Hebrew word that means “morally wrong, condemned, and guilty.” So if a person is condemned, and they're guilty because they're never embraced Christ's sacrifice on the cross, they are wicked in the sense that they are morally depraved and are not in right relationship with God, and for them there is no peace. There is no peace. And Jesus said, “Come and know Me, the Prince of Peace. I am Wonderful Counsellor. I am the Prince of Peace. I am Everlasting Father. I am the Mighty God.”

Let me just encourage you this morning. I don't know where you're at, but as we close, do inventory. Maybe you just need to be strengthened and encouraged, like I did this week. Maybe you're a believer and you don't have that peace, you're not ready to meet the Lord, you've been living too much for the things of the world and storing up things for the world, then I would encourage you to repent. It's a beautiful word. God says, “Just acknowledge it—let Me fix it.” And then get back on track with God. Feel that filling of the Holy Spirit. I bet that joy and peace will return. Isn't it interesting? Fruit of the Spirit—anger, irritability, jealousy, backbiting? No, fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and gentleness and kindness. When you finally and fully surrender yourself, you will experience that.

And of course, finally, if you don't know Christ, if you have religion and not a relationship, if you've been going through the motions, turn to Him today. Turn to Him today because you don't know when He's returning, and you don't want to miss eternity. It's stamped on our hearts, and God wants us to embrace that.