

1Peter 1:3-5, 13 Part 1 A Living Hope, Imperishable, Ready to be Revealed in the Last Time.

1 Peter 1:3-5 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:13 ¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Much of what Peter shares in this letter to the church has to do with real life they were experiencing on a day by day basis. They had temptations, they were dealing with trials of various types, there were personal relationships that were lacking in love, and just over-all selfishness. And then Peter sums up the letter as he exhorts the elders to lead the sheep as they are taught to deal with all of the above in a godly and biblical way.

But the premise of this letter still goes back to having an understanding of what a believer possesses in Christ. And with a proper understanding of this gift from Christ each believer will be equipped to deal with all of life from an eternal perspective which in turn will enable the believer to have the hope and the ability to glorify Christ here and now as we look forward to the there and then.

Last time I ended our study in this section with a quote from Paul that parallels Peter's in our text, and then asked some questions that I hope to answer today.

Romans 8:18 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

What is that glory to be revealed to us? What does it look like? What does the word of God have to say about it and how, if I understand what the glory is, can I say with Paul, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to this glory?

The glory that Paul spoke of is precisely what Peter addresses in the beginning of this letter as the living hope, the inheritance and the salvation that is ready to be revealed to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ in the last time.

Without understanding the beauty of this truth our lives here in this present world will be hamstrung because we'll be limping along thinking that the world has the upper hand and we'll be forced to carry on in our own strength, in our own understanding, as our focus will be on our present situation, with present trials, temptations and worries. And instead of preparing our minds for action, as Peter says in verse 13, we'll fix our attention on ourselves instead of God and others.

So, it is a big deal how we view this life, and the one to come, from God's perspective. So. Let's go back to verse 3 and move through this section again from a different angle.

1 Peter 1:3³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...

One of the things that is essential to understand about our salvation in Christ Jesus is where it comes from and how it is acquired. Understanding this helps us frame the issue of how Paul could consider the sufferings of this present time as he looked to the glory to be revealed. He knew the certainty of this salvation which is not merely thrown into the wind hoping it will hit someone, but rather God personally taking aim as salvation is effectually accomplished according to His will.

Much of what is taught today regarding our salvation places the effectiveness of Christ's redemptive work in the hands of sinful men who are dead in their trespasses and sins which essentially makes salvation only a possibility instead of a certainty.

And by this I mean that if Christ's sacrifice on the cross was only to make men savable, as they must now take the initiative to either accept or reject this free gift offered to them, then we run into an immediate dilemma. This dilemma has to do with the real problem with men's spiritual condition which is death.

If we believe that the word of God is telling us that some of these dead men will pull themselves up from the grave and finally see their need for a Savior then we've missed the point of what the sinful condition of man is and the nature of God's call.

Peter tells us in our text that according to His great mercy He has caused us to be born again. What does that mean? Well, let's go to the one passage we usually associate with this teaching of being born again.

^{NAU} **John 3:3** Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Jesus was addressing a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus. He was at least curious enough about the ministry of Jesus Christ to personally come to the Lord to get further information. And he makes this observation.

John 3:2b "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

And the beginning of verse 3 above is the way our Lord addresses Nicodemus. The interesting thing here is that Nicodemus nowhere implies he's looking for answers regarding how one gains access into the Kingdom of God. As far as Nicodemus is concerned he's already a part of the Kingdom.

But Jesus cuts to the chase and answers the question Nicodemus should have asked because our Lord knew his heart and that of all the things he could have said to Jesus this was at the heart of the matter as Nicodemus observed the signs and miracles of Jesus.

Remember, Nicodemus is a teacher of the law, not unlike how John the Baptist was a teacher of the law, who asked the question to Jesus after being arrested by Herod.

Matthew 11:3 "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

Christ's response is instructive.

Matthew 11:4-6 ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵*the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.* ⁶ "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

Here our Lord is quoting Isaiah.

Isaiah 35:4-6 ⁴ Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah.

Isaiah 61:1-2 ^{NAU} The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; ² To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

John the Baptist understood the message from Christ as Jesus clearly demonstrated that He was the One who fulfilled these prophecies concerning Himself as Messiah. In fact, Jesus uses this very passage to begin His ministry in Nazareth.

Luke 4:16-21 ¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." ²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Nicodemus obviously identified Jesus as a special teacher who was able to do these signs and wonders precisely because God was with Him. And yet he would not take the next step to identify Jesus as the One spoken of in Isaiah as the Messiah sent from God with the good news of eternal life.

And so, Jesus indicts Nicodemus as one who is not able to understand his own Scriptures which speak of the Messiah and the reason for the Messiah to come into this world to save His people so that they may share in the Kingdom of God.

Nicodemus wants to discuss signs and wonders and Jesus wants him to know that all things pertaining to the Messiah always lead to the Kingdom of God. And there is only one way of entrance into this Kingdom which is eternal life with God.

John 3:5-15 ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. ¹² "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. ¹⁴ "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

When Jesus speaks of being born again the phrase born again can also be translated, born from above. In other words, born of the Spirit as Jesus further explains. To be born of the Spirit is to be taken from death to life, regenerated if you will.

When writing to Titus Paul takes this exact same teaching of Jesus with Nicodemus and puts it into these words.

Titus 3:5-7 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

Nicodemus had spent his life trying to be saved on the basis of deeds done in his own righteousness and now the Savior appears and reveals Himself through signs and wonders in fulfillment to prophecy and He wonders how Nicodemus could have missed it since he was a teacher of the law.

Jesus makes the answer clear. 'The reason you cannot know Me is because, despite how you claim to be a teacher or the law, you miss the entirety of the law which speaks of Me.'

John 5:39-40 ³⁹ "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

Nicodemus wasn't coming to Jesus Christ for eternal life, he was coming to Jesus to have a discussion about how and why God was using this self-taught teacher of the law in such a mighty way. Jesus was not interested in such things. He was interested in fulfilling His work for the Father; to build His kingdom.

And that Kingdom cannot be entered into unless God is the first and last cause for His people to be born from above, because they cannot birth themselves precisely because they are dead. And this is the reason the Spirit must regenerate or reanimate His people, if you will, because before dead people can respond to anything they must first be given life from above to see and hear their God.

Again, we go back to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus.

^{NAU} **John 3:3** Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The word, cannot, in English, and dunami in Greek, both carry the idea of having the power or ability to do something. Jesus is saying that 'in your present condition, Nicodemus, you do not have the ability or power to see or enter into the Kingdom of God. That will not be accomplished until God causes you to be born from above, which is a birth you cannot initiate, since no one initiates their own birth.'

Remember Lazarus? He had been dead four days and now Jesus comes to his tomb while everyone, including the sister of Lazarus, Mary, is mourning, and Jesus approaches the tomb after praying to the Father and says this.

John 11:43 "Lazarus, come forth."

Now, here's the question. How was it physically possible for Lazarus to come forth from the grave unless he was already alive and then able to not only hear Jesus but to now walk out of the

grave? Was he first given life by God and then responded, or did he respond in his death after which he was then given life?

The answer is obvious. He must have first been given life after which he was then and only then able to respond to the command to come out of the tomb. It is absolutely no different when we speak of spiritual life and death. If we are dead in our trespasses and sins then there is no room for a type of partial death which opens the door for the possibility for man to first respond and then receive life.

This is what Paul addressed to the Romans.

Romans 3:10-12 ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

No one will seek for God, absolutely no one, and the reason is precisely the same reason Lazarus would never have sought to come out of that grave until he had first been given life by God. When Paul states in Ephesians 2:1 that we were dead in our trespasses and sins he is making the same argument.

And this is why God must cause us to be born from above, why the Holy Spirit must regenerate us, and why the Lord must take our heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh before we can respond to Him. In other words, He must first give us life and then give us the faith to respond to that life as we embrace and trust in Christ alone for that free gift of salvation.

And now that one who has been given life can see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus had to be born from above if he were to see the Kingdom. As to the issue, is this fair for God to regenerate some and not others?, let me just respond by saying is it fair if God chooses to condemn all men because of their sin and rebellion?

None of us deserve life, we all deserve death and condemnation from God, but so as not to confuse the issue let me allow Paul to give the final word as to this misunderstood problem and then we'll move on.

Romans 9:18-24 ¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why

does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴*even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

So, what is Peter's point when he goes on to address what we have been saved unto?

1 Peter 1:3-5 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ *to obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So, there is a cause and an effect. The cause? God's regenerating power as the Holy Spirit births us from above to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior. The effect? Being born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What is the end game, as it were, when it comes to our salvation, and does an accurate assessment of this hope, this inheritance, make any difference how we live today? This is Peter's point.

Only when we see what our final destination is and the certainty of us possessing it will we be able to contend, endure, persevere and anticipate with a hope that sees beyond this world with its trials and tribulations and then runs the race with joy knowing what lies ahead at the finish line.

More often than not when you ask a Christian what his final home will be his answer will usually include the obligatory, heaven. But when you push someone to explain heaven or describe that final state of men in Christ, the other answer has a tendency to be, well we really don't know but it will be beyond our imaginations.

While it is true that what our infinite God has in store for finite creatures is beyond anything we could imagine it doesn't mean has not revealed anything to us that is comprehended by finite creatures, namely human beings who have been given God's revelation, both general and special.

This is why when you go back and look at how the saints of old looked to the hope set before them that Peter understood as well as Paul and even Adam, along with Abraham, they were not content with such an answer that includes, 'we could never imagine what God has in store for us.'

In fact, they knew heaven was not beyond their imaginations, but was revealed by God Himself to be something they could actually envision and understand. And they wrote about it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has been revealed to you and me if we would just look at it.

The idea of heaven has seemed to escape people in the church today, and if people are honest, they will tell you that it's an existence apart from our bodies and therefore is some ethereal, incorporeal, and other-worldly existence.

But is this what our existence in heaven is? If you look at the teachings of Paul regarding this issue the one passage that conspicuously shows up time and again is found in the second letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

And of course, when Paul writes to the church in Philippi he makes a similar statement.

Philippians 1:21-24 ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Obviously, the flesh is a detriment to our ability to be with Christ, but since Paul can only serve the saints in the flesh I guess he'll

have to soldier on and squander his chance to be absent from this flesh which would result in being with the Lord. Isn't that what Paul longed for, is this not what Paul hoped for, was this not the epitome of what it meant for Paul to be with Christ?

And Paul would answer, absolutely not. His ultimate hope was not to be absent from the body so that he could be present with the Lord. Most assuredly, he says in Philippians 1:23, that is very much better, but for Paul that was not the best.

He, like anyone of us who have placed our faith in Christ, would certainly prefer not to have to contend with this world of sin and curse and to actually have a place in heaven with Christ, but even Jesus Christ would tell us that this is not the plan He has for us. He didn't die and rise from the dead so that we can exist in a non-corporeal setting in some sort of spiritual existence.

Paul didn't give his life for the gospel of Jesus Christ so that he could be absent from the body and present with the Lord, though again, I would reiterate, that would be very much better. Let me just allow Paul to demonstrate why he was willing to give his life for the gospel message.

Acts 23:6⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

Acts 24:17-21¹⁷ "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; ¹⁸ in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* some Jews from Asia-- ¹⁹ who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. ²⁰ "Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, ²¹ other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"

Paul was willing to lay down his life for the hope of Israel.

Acts 28:20²⁰ "For this reason, therefore, I ¹requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

Well, what was that hope?

^{NAU} **Acts 6:6** "And now I am ¹standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷ *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

And this hope would be what? Let Paul finish his sentence.

⁸ "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?

Why was Paul's ultimate hope the resurrection of the dead instead of being absent from the body? Because Paul knew what Christ's desire for His people was and it was never intended to absent from the body for eternity.

Unless we redefine resurrection it cannot be escaped that the eternal decree of God was to send His Son to die for a people who would spend eternity with Him on the one place man was always intended to dwell and that is the earth. We were always made for the earth. We are creatures that are earthy because we were made from the earth.

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Notice that man's existence didn't start with the spirit of man it began with his body made from the earth. It isn't until man was fully formed, that is constructed with all of parts fully intact and ready for function that God then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and then he becomes a living being, but a being that is physical first and then spiritual second in chronology.

He was born from the earth and will return to the earth in death, but will be raised out of the earth to be re-formed again by God in his resurrection from the dead.

To suggest that we would live anywhere else other than the earth, that God created for us, defies logic in light of resurrection. Resurrection is taking the body that goes down into the grave corruptible and raising that same body incorruptible. Well, if you raise the body what do you have? A physical, conscious, breathing, moving and thankful body with all of the qualities that were secured for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, where does a body like this ultimately dwell? Well, heaven of course. The question is, where is heaven and what heaven are we talking about? The short answer is there are two heavens, the present heaven, and the eternal future heaven, a place where God dwells now and will dwell in the future.

As to the present heaven it is the place that believers in Christ go to be with the Lord when they die as Paul made clear; to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But what is this place? I'm not going to go into every detail at this juncture regarding what theologians call the intermediate state, but I will say that most people, including most theologians, regard the present heaven as purely spiritual.

In other words, since our spirits go to be with the Lord while our physical bodies remain in the earth then we must conclude that our existence in the present heaven is therefore spiritual. Fair enough. But we have to ask ourselves some questions.

Is Jesus Christ presently in heaven with a physical body, albeit a resurrected glorified body? When He told the repentant thief on the cross who acknowledged the Messiah who hung opposite him, that today he would be with Christ in paradise, what are we to understand of this paradise?

When Enoch and Elijah were physically taken into heaven by God without dying were their bodies transformed into spirits as their bodies were discarded between earth and heaven? When Moses and Elijah appeared before the Lord Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration was Jesus transfigured into a spirit and were Moses and Elijah spirits? What did Paul think they were when he was willing to build them temporary shelters so that they might recline and spend some time on earth?

What about other things in the present heaven that defy explanation other than to say they must be physical in some sort of way? Consider the time in which Elisha and his servant were surrounded by an army of enemy soldiers together with their chariots and horses.

2 Kings 6:15-17 ¹⁵Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶ So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that

he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Were these real heavenly horses and chariots that presumably contained angels, or is this some sort of metaphor for God's power as Elisha employs poetic language that was never meant to be taken literally? Is 2Kings a poetic book or a book of history?

And speaking of animals in heaven are horses the only animals mentioned as residing in heaven? Consider the beings surrounding the throne of God day and night singing holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

Revelation 4:8-9 ⁸ And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." ⁹ And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,

These living creatures, as they are depicted in the NAU, are said to have six wings as they give glory to God. We know these creatures to be the same Seraphim described in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:1-3 ^{NAU} In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

So, because Seraphim are described in an eschatological and prophetic part of Scripture does this mean they aren't real? Well, the Lord is also described sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted in the same text. Is He not real?

By the way, the words, living creatures, used to describe the Seraphim in Revelation 4 is only one word in the Greek, zoon. It means animal in most other contexts in the New Testament and in the book of revelation the word zoon is used exclusively of these living creatures. There is no reason not to describe these living creatures, zoon, as heavenly animals who surround the throne of God.

You'll also note that in Revelation three classes of worshippers are said to surround the throne of God.

Revelation 5:11 ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,

This is obviously part of the vision of John in prophetic language. Does this mean that elders, (ie. human beings gone to be with the Lord), and angels are not real? If they exist around the throne of God in the present heaven, why not heavenly animals who join them in praise?

If these animals called Seraphim have wings, unlike angels who are never depicted with wings, and they are able to fly does it not follow that they have an atmosphere to fly in? If the angels and elders can sing praises to God does it not follow that there is an atmosphere to carry sound and an environment in which time truly exists even as it does on earth? Music has meter and tempo and a beginning and an end, all elements of time. In fact, we know that time exists in the present heaven from another passage found in Revelation.

Revelation 8:1 ^{NAU} When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

This was not John's perspective of time passing as he views certain things happening in heaven. It clearly says there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

It seems to me that the present heaven is sounding more and more like a real vibrant place that has more of a physical presence than we might have imagined, with animals, people, angels, time, space, music, singing of praises and a throne on which a physical resurrected Jesus sits, a paradise that demonstrates a well groomed garden which is what paradise means.

Granted, if there are physical aspects to the present heaven they are not the ultimate physical expression of what the eternal heaven is to be like. But having said that why would we limit the present heaven to some unfamiliar, esoteric, and other-worldly existence when the Scriptures sure seem to be painting a picture of a place that is more familiar, with people knowing and expecting the final culmination of what Christ came to secure in His own resurrection.

These people know where they came from and they know where they're going. Again, consider the saints around the throne having access to Jesus Christ and asking some very poignant questions.

Revelation 6:9-11 ⁹ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; ¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

We know this is a prophetic, eschatological context, but does that negate the fact that these are real people in the presence of God asking Him a specific time related question? If time doesn't exist in the present heaven then why are they told to wait and rest until God was finished with His work? And by the way, why do spirits need to be given white robes if they are mere spirits?

Oh you see, the white robe is symbolic of the pure righteousness of Christ in which these souls have been clothed. They were never meant to be understood as real robes, everyone knows that. So, the ring I wear on my left hand isn't real, simply because it's a symbol of my love for my wife? Just sayin'.

So, I kind of went in a direction that didn't answer some of the questions I posed, but it did raise some interesting thoughts concerning our intermediate state which even Paul looked forward to and is now enjoying in the presence of Christ and other brothers and sisters in Christ.

But this is all part of our inheritance that Peter in our text addresses, even if it's only a down payment to the final expression of our inheritance on the eternal heaven which we'll address next time.

But suffice it to say, simply because the present heaven is often addressed in prophetic and symbolic language there was nothing symbolic about our Lord's promise of sharing paradise with the repentant thief on the day of His crucifixion.

As was said earlier, paradise speaks of a real place where real people interact and enjoy the beauties of such a place that awaits every believer on that day when they depart this world to be escorted into the presence of the physical resurrected Jesus Christ to be with Him forever more. And that forever more will be discussed next time.

But in the mean time we still have a responsibility to honor and serve Christ in this present world as we anticipate our meeting Christ face to face in the present heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:6-9 ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.