

Session 3

The Resurrection: EARTH

Introduction

Over the past two sessions we've been thinking about how we are an Easter people, that the resurrection is central to our faith. It defines the Christian faith. Without the resurrection or with a confused ethereal understanding of the resurrection we diminish true faith. We've thought about the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the implication for our future bodies. We've also investigated our ideas about heaven and where heaven is located. In this session we think about the implications of the resurrection for future life on Earth. If Revelation 21 paints a picture of Heaven being 'made' on Earth should this affect the way we view the Earth and its future?

Opening Worship

Think about what worship really means to you? We all know that worship is more than just singing a song on a Sunday morning or in small group worship time but does it extend to the way we care for the earth? Is recycling an act of worship for example? Signing a Kyoto agreement? Growing your own vegetables? Worshipping God is giving him our all and giving sacrificial offerings to him. Think about a fresh way to worship God as you gather this for this time.

Thinking about...

Read 2 Peter 3:8-15

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.[Ⓜ]

¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.[Ⓜ] That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

- a. [2 Peter 3:10](#) Some manuscripts *be burned up*
- b. [2 Peter 3:12](#) Or *as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come*

Questions

1. What do these verses appear to suggest will happen at the end?
2. Verse 10 needs to be understood in the following light. 'Be laid bare' gives more options in interpretation. Some argue that taking into consideration Peter's worldview about the Day of the Lord or the Day of Judgement he is thinking about judgement rather than reading verse 10 as cosmic destruction! What are your thoughts on this?

3. Read verses 11-15. What attitude should we have about the End? Discuss your views

Read the following article on **Heaven, Earth and the End**

Blanchard says, 'believers banking on spending eternity on the other side of Jupiter should revise their expectations.' A vital key to understanding what the Bible says about the location of heaven is to grasp what it says about the future state of the earth. N.T Wright (2007) and Daniel Button (2009) make it clear that, 'the terminal point of human life is not death, nor is it spiritual existence in Heaven; rather the terminus is resurrection.' It is both the prevailing dualistic worldview and, perhaps, a medieval notion of ghostly spiritual existence of Heaven that has drawn us away from a concrete and earthly understanding of real resurrection. C.S. Lewis (1945) writes beautifully and movingly about the very real physicality of Heaven in his Great Divorce. A concrete understanding of Heaven 'down here' could mean a greater desire to engage environmental concerns for the future of the planet.

Taking redemption, repentance and hope seriously

'The problem with secular environmentalism is that when the tipping point is reached, when it seems we can no longer make a difference, political will and therefore funding is lost' (Button 2009). 'If the earth is to be destroyed at the Parousia then environmental action is at best patching up a dying man's coat and a waste of time' (Bishop 1991). 'God does not consign the creation to destruction' (Rossing 2008).

Rossing (2008) suggests that the apocalyptic nature of both 2 Peter and Revelation need to be understood in slightly different ways. Following the work of Schussler Fiorenza, Rossing notes that apocalyptic language can function in two ways, 'either to control the behaviour of individuals or to provide an alternative vision and encouragement of new communities.'

Rossing feels the 2 Peter 3 material falls into the first more moralist category yet one might argue that both should be considered. Rossing believes that essentially Revelation 21 is a clarion call to the church to come out of 'Empire'. She has great difficulty in finding any other reading of 2 Peter 3, other than a literalistic interpretation of world-destroying fire, but senses that 'Revelation teaches a logic that invites readers to embrace life on earth.' Indeed, it seems that Revelation 21 offers us a picture of hope, a source of comfort and both 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21 invite us to consider our actions in the immediate future. God's judgement is not to be taken lightly and judgement is not just excluded to personal moral acts but to our inconsideration of the world at large. Judgement is meant not to cause paralysis but to bring repentance and, ultimately, renewed commitment to action. This is what Rossing calls, 'the Bible's counter-imperial message of repentance and hope. 'We should believe that this world has a future in God's plan of redemption' (Heide 1997). If indeed the world has a future, what are some practical steps we might consider in the light of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21? The future hope of resurrection will surely penetrate into our concrete situations, for our vision of the future enables several things. We should strive to participate in earth care, in eco-justice and serious reflection on these issues.

Questions

1. Think about your own views on the end? Will God destroy everything and start from scratch or will he renew, restore and remould the world we already have?
2. Does this really make any difference to the way we care for and interact with the physical world today? Discuss honestly and openly with one another.
3. If not already doing so find ways to make caring for the God's creation part of your everyday life. Discuss these in the group. Make each other accountable.