



“What about Heaven?”

Revelation 21:1-5

March 1, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s A Great Question!”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

This message looks at the promise of eternal life, the reality of God’s kingdom, and it’s relevance for our lives today as it affects not only our future in the afterlife but how we view life today and our life’s orientation. The image and metaphor for “downtown” or “going downtown” was interwoven throughout. The main areas of focus for the new heavens and earth, is that eternal life is the complete absence of tension, complete presence of good, and that the main message of the bible is getting heaven into you.

GETTING STARTED

1. What’s your idea of paradise in this world? Example – a tropical island, all day with a good book, a certain type of food or dessert, the right company, and so on.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

2. Consider the meaning of “new,” in this passage where John describes “I saw a new heavens and new earth...” Remember Henry introduced this as the quality of something improving over time – Kainos. This is different from the other Greek word in the New Testament “neos” which is about something new in time and place. God wants to accomplish kainos in us and that’s the word being used here.

What is kainos in relationship to our lives in Christ? Why is it important for us in experiencing Christ today and in preparation for the life to come?

3. Consider “new heavens” and “new earth.” Henry spoke about this. What’s John getting at? Reflect on the meaning behind reality as God is shaping and preparing for it.
4. When this passage speaks of “God dwell with his people” and vice versa, what is that telling you about heaven?

5. Breakdown the absence of tension in the verses where it says “there will be no more death, crying, pain...” Consider each of these. Again – what’s it pointing to about heaven and our notion of “paradise?”
6. Read Matthew 5: 1-12. What’s Jesus getting at here and also in the Sermon on the Mount?
Consider 5: 21-22 and 5: 27-30. What’s he telling people about heaven? What is he addressing?
What’s Jesus most concerned about with heaven?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. How does your view of heaven shape your outlook and orientation in life (behavior and lifestyle), today? Consider what CS Lewis once wrote “If you aim for heaven, you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth, you get neither.” Why is our aim so important? What’s your target pointing at for how you live?
8. Remember the quote by James Bryan Smith that Henry referenced – “Who are you and where are you?” The answer for people of faith when our identity is steeped in Christ: “I am a beloved child of God, and I am living beneath the unshakable kingdom of God.”
Ask yourself – what’s my honest answer to that today? Consider challenging yourself with that question as you start your day and practice it throughout, especially when there’s pain, disappointment, and worry.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for this Season of Lent for Bidwell, that our people go deep in faith (through study/reflection or otherwise). Pray also for Pastor Ray Medina who began his ministry here with us this past week. Pray for his ministry and family as they transition and see what God has in store for them here.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“We can think of ourselves as fun-loving, and perhaps of God as a humorless killjoy. But we’ve got it backward. It’s not God who’s boring. It would be us. Did we invent wit, humor, and laughter? No. God did. We’ll never begin to exhaust God’s sense of humor and his love for adventure. (His delight in all enjoyment is beyond ours – he made it.) The real question is this: How could God not be bored with us?” Randy Alcorn, Heaven

“What About Hell?”

Luke 16: 19-31

March 8, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Great Question!” – Finding Answers to Questions of Faith”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

There were three main points made about hell in this message – it’s the absence of good. Disintegration of a person. And that God desires not only to keep you out of hell by sending his son Jesus Christ to die for you sins, but to remove hell from your life and the dark areas of life today.

GETTING STARTED

1. Describe an image you have from hell from the arts. Perhaps it’s a movie, play, painting or sculpture.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read Luke 16: 19-31

2. Apply the framework of the absence of good and disintegration as they can be depicted in this message.
3. Consider the way the rich man treats Lazarus in this Scripture in the afterlife. What can that tell you about him?
4. This passage is not about wealth and its condemnation. But it does highlight how wealth can in some cases have trappings that blind us and distort reality. What are those and how can that become damning?
5. The name Lazarus is used here. It’s the only parable of the bible where Jesus names a character in this story. It means “God is my help” or “God is my helper.” What do you make of that as a defining trait of who a person is and what they’re about? How is that in and of itself a proclamation of faith? How is that poignant?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

6. Explain your understanding of hell both as a reality and in the afterlife. And as something we experience in the present. Remember Henry’s examples of Somalia and Tegucigalpa in Honduras.
7. Where do you see hell on earth? Think personally, locally and nationally first before jumping into the “third world.” Consider the breakdown of relationships and injustices.
8. What “hells” do you intentionally enter into in order to do your fair share of bringing hope to others?
9. Why is there a sense of urgency of sharing our faith? Think less about converting someone to know Christ so they avoid hell. But rather talking about the meaning of our faith to us personally before others, and modeling it with excellence.

10. What does the role of having theological imagination (IE – entertaining images of a worldview in the bible about heaven and hell and God's new creation), have to do with one's faith? And why are these topics of heaven and hell important to discuss and think about?

THE "EXTRA-MILE"

11. Remember the 30-Day Challenge for Study during Lent. Consider reading *The Great Divorce* by CS Lewis if you haven't already.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God*

“What Are Jesus’ Politics?”

Mark 1: 9-11, 14-15

March 15, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Great Question!” – Finding Answers to Questions of Faith”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

The message looked at the domain and reality of God’s kingdom breaking in today. When Jesus said “The kingdom of heaven has come near. Repent and believe the good news,” he was making a powerful, even political statement. It was one about the politics of the kingdom of God. A new realm of life was breaking forth. This liberates us. Our home is eternal. And this eternal home is never, ever under threat. We can live without fear. And with a sense of incredible significance. And this informs our political views too. Jesus breaks our own categories. Our political candidates and leaders should be viewed with deep, deep discernment. They’re flawed like you and me. And we serve King Jesus and represent his kingdom. This sense of security and belonging allows us to think social and politically with a worldview that’s scripturally informed and represents this character of Christ. This enables us to vote, live, think and discern without fear but in love, sense of Christ’s power, and sound mind.

GETTING STARTED

1. Talk about how you’re doing with everything regarding the need of social distancing and what’s happening with the Corona Virus. Be mindful of understanding the other as this is discussed.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read Mark 1: 9-11, 14-15

2. The word for repent – metanoia – means to turnaround one’s mind, to make a decision about something. What does that have to do with Jesus’s message about the kingdom of God coming near?
3. How would the term “kingdom” ring politically during that time. Explain.
4. Consider the relationship Jesus had with power including King Herod (both at his birth and during his ministry) and Pontius Pilate. How did they treat Jesus? Explain

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. The message highlights what drives how we vote, define moral issues of our time, and what political candidates we back.

What does living without fear have to do with that?

6. Henry mentioned how the bible was written during periods of political oppression. That is the Jewish people were always viewing political authority with suspicion and a discerning eye. To what degree should we do that? And further – why? What does this have to do with the kingdom of God and its values.
7. How do people make Jesus a “footnote” to their own political and social views? Give an example. What’s the better alternative for Christ followers?

8. Henry talked about significance (you're a child of God) and security or safety (you live beneath the reign of God's unshakable kingdom).

Do you think you can feel safe and secure knowing God's kingdom is eternal and you're a citizen of it?

THE "EXTRA-MILE"

9. Please practice social distancing this week, if not for your own good, then for the good of the most vulnerable.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

10. Pray for the containment and elimination of the Corona Virus. Pray for healing for those who are sick from it.

“Wealth – Blessing or Burden?”

Matthew 19: 16-26

March 22, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Great Question!” – Finding Answers to Questions of Faith”

Rev. Ray Medina

GETTING STARTED

1. Check in with each other about how you’re doing and how COVID-19 is affecting you directly. Be mindful of understanding the other as this is discussed.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, Reread the biblical text for the morning: Matthew 19:16-26. If your group wants to read more bible, continue reading Peter’s response to Jesus in Matt. 19:27-30. Other Scriptures could include 1 Timothy 6:3-10, Luke 18:18-30; Mark 10:17-27; and Acts 10:1-8.

2. Give an example of how the beginning of your journey of following Jesus became a call to “forsake” the world (wealth, identity, security) and follow him?
3. How can Bidwell Church be a community of prayer and generosity right now? What service programs are already in place in which we can participate on behalf of the community and/or one another? To what new service projects might God be calling us within our current circumstances?
4. Who are the “poor” in Chico? How are they blessed? In what ways can a community like Bidwell Church be a church that is generous toward the poor? In what ways are we called to come alongside the poor?
5. What does prayer look like for you within our present circumstances? What prayer practice might you integrate into your daily rhythms so as to become more dependent and secure on God and God’s kingdom?
6. In the story of the rich (young ruler) man, how am I still like that rich man? How is Jesus unmasking my fake gods and false first loves right now amidst our global pandemic? What does leaning into God’s transformation look like for me right now?
7. How is the “eternal and unshakeable kingdom” a source of security and identity for me?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for the containment and elimination of the Corona Virus. Pray for healing for those who are sick from it.

“Is Faith All I Need?”

Luke 8:22-25

March 29, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Great Question!” – Finding Answers to Questions of Faith”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

GETTING STARTED

1. Talk about how you’re doing with everything regarding the need of social distancing and what’s happening with the Corona Virus. Be mindful of understanding the other as this is discussed. How are you?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read Luke 8:22-25

2. Describe an obstacle(s) you are facing right now. How has life changed for you the past three weeks. How is it the same too?
3. What’s the outcome of the story? What realization do Jesus’s followers have? What’s their reverence toward at the end? What did the obstacle become the way toward?
4. Describe the meaning behind Jesus’s question – “where is your faith?” What’s he getting at?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. Consider a question Henry asked in his message – “What do you have in your life – where if it were taken away from you would be profoundly devastating?” Does this say anything about what your faith is in. It may or it may not.

Consider things like financial security, work, people and so on.

6. Share a time when an obstacle in your life became the way toward greater purpose, capability and freedom.
7. Describe the difference between Jesus being our Savior instead of life manager or assistant. What was meant by that in the message?
8. What’s the relationship between faith and virtue? How does faith lead to the latter?

THE “EXTRA-MILE”

9. Please practice social distancing this week, if not for your own good, then for the good of the most vulnerable. And reach out to someone who’s isolated and could use some encouragement.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

10. Pray for the containment and elimination of the Corona Virus. Pray for healing for those who are sick from it.

“How do I experience God when it hurts?”

John 12:12-26

April 5, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Good Question”

Rev. Shannon Coon

THE BIG IDEA

Today is Palm Sunday. It marks the story of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Today is also known as Passion Sunday because it is the beginning of the week that will entail Jesus’ passion story. It is amazing to think that just days after the crowds hailed Jesus as “Hosanna” they then yelled out, “Crucify him!” Jesus knew the depths of human suffering and pain. And we too, in our lives experience hurts, suffering, pain, hardship. How do we know that God is really with us through it all? Intellectually and theologically we know that because of Jesus’ suffering he knows exactly what we are going through and is with us every step of our lives, through good and bad. But we don’t always *feel* God’s presence when we are hurting, do we? Tim Keller says that when we are going through a difficult time, we can have 2 responses with regards to God. We can either abandon God and say, “You let this happen to me, I want to have nothing to do with you!” Or, we can draw nearer to God. Assuming we do the latter, there are certain ways we can lean into experiencing God through the difficulties we are experiencing, whatever they may be.

GETTING STARTED

Talk about a time when you were experiencing something painful or trying and you did not feel the presence of God. How did you reconcile that God hadn’t actually abandon you?

Talk about a time when you experienced a hardship and you DID feel the presence of God. What did that look like or feel like? In other words, how would you explain that you felt the presence of God at that time?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **John 12:12-26: (you could actually read all the way to verse 36 – there are some great things in all of it!)**

1. Verse 13 tells us that as Jesus was entering Jerusalem, the people shouted “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!” “Hosanna” is a Hebrew term that literally means, “save please!” The Hebrew word comes from the same root word as “Hosea,” “Joshua,” and... “Jesus.” (The pronunciation of Jesus’ name in Aramaic sounds like, “Yeshua”) In addition, the exhortation “hosanna” is a reference to Psalm 118 (see specifically verse 25 and thereafter). Psalms 113-118 would have been the psalms that pilgrims sang as they came into Jerusalem for the Passover holiday.

Why do you suppose the people were calling out to be saved? What did they think Jesus might be saving them from? What about us today? From what do we seek salvation? (not just generally, but also specifically?)

2. In verses 14-15 John tells us that Jesus riding a donkey colt pointed to a particular scripture and it was quoted: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look your king is coming sitting on a donkey’s colt!” This is direct reference to the words of the prophet Zechariah – chapter 9, verse 9. Take a moment to look at it in your Bible. Zechariah prophesied about a triumphant king who will reassure God’s people that God makes good on his promises, that God redeems and is faithful to his covenants. The triumphant king is actually a vision of Zechariah’s as a “righteous” king (the word “triumphant” doesn’t capture the idea as

accurately). He is a king who is not engaged in militaristic power, but rather the power of justice. In addition, the word “humble” which Zechariah uses to describe this king does not mean “meek” or “gentle,” but rather “afflicted” – someone who does not lord power over people, nor come from the trappings of wealth and worldly power. Zechariah’s vision of the king is one who takes his place with those who are suffering. Therefore, John in his gospel is saying that Jesus fits the description of the kind of king Zechariah prophesied.

What might that mean to the people at that time that their king would suffer *with* them or *for* them? What does it mean to you today? Do you believe that when you are suffering, hurting, or going through hardship that you have a savior who has also experienced suffering?

3. Later in the story, we hear some interesting words from Jesus. **What do they mean to you?**

Verse 23: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

Verse 24: “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Verse 25: “Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Verse 26: “Whoever serves me must follow me...”

4. Let’s spend some time on verse 26. Many times, in the gospels, Jesus is telling people “Follow me.” Often, he wants people to just drop what they’re doing and literally follow him all over as he preaches and teaches. Some do, and some don’t. But here, in the context of this story, because we know what is ahead for Jesus, what do you think Jesus is saying that one must choose to follow him *into*?

Christian author George MacDonald says this: “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men and women might not suffer, but that their suffering might be like His.”

Wow. Hard to hear, hard to read. But it is true that none of us is exempt from suffering in this world. How do we handle it when we are hurting? How do we experience God when it happens to us? Following are some ways to experience God in our hurts.

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. Be honest with God about what we are feeling and what we need. Admit that whatever we are going through is hard, painful, depressing, etc. It is called “lamenting.” Theologian NT Wright wrote this earlier in the week on Time.com:

“...perhaps what we need...is to recover the biblical tradition of *lament*. Lament is what happens when people ask, “Why?” and don’t get an answer. It’s where we get to when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our sins and failings and look more broadly at the suffering of the world.

The point of lament, woven thus into the fabric of the biblical tradition, is not just that it’s an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that *God also laments*. Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That’s not the picture we get in the Bible.

It is no part of the Christian vocation, then, to be able to explain what’s happening and why. In fact, it *is* part of the Christian vocation *not to be able* to explain—and to lament instead. As the

Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell.”

When we lament, when we are honest with God, we give God access to our hearts. This is one of the ways we can open ourselves to experiencing God when it hurts.

6. We go into all hardships with the Gospel. We know that this “Passion Week” of Jesus’s is not the end of the story. We know that next Sunday triumph over death, evil, pain, suffering, hurt will occur. And that is the rhythm of our lives as believers. And so, as we face whatever hardship we are in, let us not do so without the gospel...knowing that the hardship will not have the last word.
7. We can find ways to practically experience God’s presence (even in “sheltering in place!”):
 - a. Pray the psalms. This is an excellent way to practice lamenting to God. Jesus did it from the cross with Psalm 22. You can take the ancient words of human hurt and struggle and make them your own:
 - i. E.g. - “Please God do not be far from me. I turn to you for help, and I ask that you come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from feeling pierced through; deliver my life from anything that threatens death to me; save me from feeling like I’m being ravaged by a lion!” (Ps 22: 19-21)
 - b. Have a visual or audible aid that can remind you of the presence of God. Put post-its around with a meaningful Bible verse; light a candle in a room where you are spending time; play a favorite hymn or worship song every couple of hours. Find ways that you can see and hear reminders of God’s presence throughout your day.
 - c. Find a way to connect with nature and/or the creative energy inside of you. In times of darkness or illness we can forget that God is continuing to create beauty and goodness all around us. Even just a walk around the block can help you re-connect with the God of creation. And certainly, finding a way to express your own creativity, whether it is through art, baking, woodworking, playing an instrument will put you in touch with all the goodness that God created the world from.
 - d. Do not isolate. Let people into your hurting! Even in social distancing we can let people “in.” There are many ways to connect electronically, but also the telephone or old-fashioned letters. During times of hardship, relationships remind us that God is at work.

RECOMMENDED READING

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering, Timothy Keller, Dutton Publishing, 2013.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

“What Can I Do To Experience Christ’s Resurrection, Today?”

John 21: 10-14

April 12, 2020

Sermon Series: “That’s a Great Question!” – Finding Answers to Questions of Faith”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

GETTING STARTED

1. How did your Easter go? What did you do throughout the day? Check-in with each other.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read John 21: 10-14

2. What do you make of Jesus wanting to have breakfast with his disciples? In general, discuss Jesus’s pattern of enjoying food with others throughout his ministry. Talk about any examples you can give of his interactions with food and people while enjoying it, and how it provided a context for ministry.
3. How has culture shifted with regards to our attitude toward food and use of it? Consider the fast-food trend. How is fast-food unhealthy (obviously this is true from a nutritional standpoint) from a social point of view?
4. Read the following:
Luke 22:19-20 “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”
Luke 24:31 “Jesus broke the bread. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him”

What’s the meaning of these Scriptures?

5. What meaning does communion hold for you? What meaning did it hold for the earliest believers?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

6. How will you practice the resurrection this week. Consider examples Henry gave below. And consider creating your own.

Practicing and Experiencing the Resurrection

- *Take On* preparing meals for your family as a daily spiritual practice. Invite your children to do that with you. If you’re isolated without company, practice enjoying a hand-prepared meal on your own at your home.
- *Start* that herb or plant garden, if you don’t have one already. Include fresh elements in your enjoyment of food, and preparation and consumption.
- *Slow Down* while you enjoy. Go ahead and chew that food thirty or more times.
- *Invite God* into your home as you eat. Take a moment to pray for the vulnerable and your own family and friends, and ask God to bless the elements you eat that they would be of use to his kingdom on earth.

- *Be Reminded* of new, fresh abundant life. Christ is Risen. His triumphant, powerful presence draws near to you in this time and place. May Easter be Wonder-Full.

7. Name all of the implications of the resurrection you can think of for your faith? How do or can they shape your outlook on life and the afterlife?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Present your own prayer requests and take turns praying for each other.