

Embracing God's Plan

07 - Overcoming Stress I 20 - 2 Peter: A Blazing Faith
Sunday, 10 Nov 2013 | Church on the Park

Text: 2 Peter 3:9-14

Theme: God has an amazing plan for the heavens and earth, but we need to embrace it to get in on it.

Intro: Today, we are going to talk about not just God's plan for us personally, but God's plan for all of creation. God's good news is for all the heavens and the earth. He has a plan to make everything new. Specifically, in this message we are going to converge two series of messages: 1) Overcoming Stress, and 2) 2 Peter. The main two questions throughout this message are: *what does the future hold and how do you embrace God's plan?*

1) In the beginning God did not create the earth to be a stressful place. In the end he will fulfill his plan for earth to be a place of peace and righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:13)

- (In order to understand the end of 2 Peter, we need to go back to the beginning.)
- God has given his people many very **great** and **precious promises** (2 Pet. 1:3, 4).
 - **Two** of the most important and **unshakeable promises** he has given us are: 1) Jesus is **coming back** again to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, and 2) God will make a **new heavens and new earth**, where righteousness dwells.
 - Both of these promises should give us great **hope** and help us put into **perspective** the everyday **stresses** of life.
 - My experience with **tasting heaven** as a young believer.
 - At first, I could not understand why people longed for the coming of Jesus.
 - Let's see what **God's ultimate plan** for creation is: **Revelation 21:1-5**
 - A **new** heaven and new earth. Why? Because the first heaven and earth were corrupted by sin.
 - God **dwelling** with his people, his creation
 - The church is a foretaste of heaven on earth
 - Every tear wiped from his people's eyes
 - **No** more **death**, no more **mourning**, no more **crying**, no more **pain**—here's the **elimination** of the **stresses** of life.
 - The old order of sin, degeneration and death passed away, and God's new order put into place. This is the ultimate fulfillment of **God's Kingdom on earth**.
 - The **law of entropy** gone
 - "the level of disorder in the universe is steadily increasing. Systems tend to move from ordered behavior to more random behavior...The second law also predicts the end of the universe: it implies that the universe will end in a 'heat death' in which everything is at the same temperature. This is the ultimate level of disorder..." (www.physics.bu.edu)
 - Physicist **Lord Kelvin** originated the idea of **universal heat death** in 1852
 - God's plan is **sure**. It's already sealed and done. We are just waiting for it to unfold.
Rev. 21:6

2) God wants everybody to be in on his plan, but he makes it clear that not everybody will accept his plan. (2 Pet 3:9 & Rev. 21:6-8)

- 2 Pet. 3:9, Rev. 1:8
- Jesus clearly communicated the **way** into God's Kingdom, but even some of the greatest minds and moralists have **struggled** to understand it.
- John 3:1-4 - Jesus & Nico (Nicodemus)
 - We've been blessed to give birth to four **children**. Each **birth** was unique
 - **Gideon** was born without Anna taking any drugs. When he was born all the nurses remarked on how loud his **voice** was.
 - Birth brings us into this world so that we can live and communicate in it.
 - **Allison** was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck three times. When she was born we noticed how piercing and observant her **eyes** were
 - **Eva** was born with one push and immediately began **feeding**
 - **Valerie** was also born with one push and I noticed how intently she was **listening**.
 - We are all born into this world, but to enter God's Kingdom we need **another type** of birth, a **spiritual birth**. (John 3:5-8)
 - The **way** in is through being **born again** (John 3:9-15)
 - Being born again means being made **alive** to God—now you are living in the Kingdom, you can **hear, see** and **taste** God.
 - It's only possible through the **Holy Spirit** and believing in **God's Son**, Jesus (John 3:16-21)
 - Jesus is the **way** into the Kingdom of God (**John 14:6**). Embracing Jesus means embracing God's plan.
 - What's the **alternative** to God's Kingdom?

3) Many people get angry with Jesus because he not only talked about heaven but also hell (that is eternal judgment). But logically, there can be no heaven without a hell and if someone was heading to destruction, love necessitates for you to warn them. (Rev. 21:6-8, Rev. 20:11-15, 22:15)

- Your **neighborhood** wouldn't be safe if it had rapists, thieves, murderers and child abusers.
 - We have **jails** to keep our cities **safe**.
- If God didn't have a place of **judgment**, his eternal **Kingdom** would not be **safe**.
- Before the new heavens and the new earth, there has to be a great **cleansing**. In other words, a judgment to **remove** evil (Rev. 20:11-15)
 - God needs to remove the **weeds** from his garden so that his garden is a home of righteousness (Eva & Popa).
- God, in his mercy, **warns** us in advance of what is to come. You should not take his warnings **casually** or put off surrendering your life to him till tomorrow.
- **Rev. 21:7** - "those who are **victorious** will inherit all this". How is it possible to be victorious? 1 John 5:1-5, 13

Conclusion: God's plan for the earth is to be a place of peace and righteous. If we are going to embrace God's plan we need to embrace his peace and righteousness—Jesus Christ—and allow him to give us new life.

END NOTES:

οὐρανός *ouranós*; gen. *ouranoú*, masc. noun. Heaven, sky, air. **The sing. and pl. are used similarly and interchangeably. There is no difference in meaning between them.**

(I) In the NT, in a physical sense, it means the over-arching, all-embracing heaven beneath which is the earth and all that is therein. In this not only do the fowl of the air fly (Matt. 6:26; 8:20; 13:32), but the clouds are suspended (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Luke 12:56) and the rain is formed (James 5:18); also the sun, moon and stars are placed in the same celestial expanse (Mark 13:25; Heb. 11:12).

(II) It is also used for that heaven where the residence of God is, called by the Psalmist “the holy heavens” (a.t.), or “heavens of holiness” (a.t.), of separation (Sept.: Ps. 20:6). It is God’s dwelling or resting place (Matt. 5:34, 45, 48); where the blessed angels are (Mark 13:27); from whence Christ descended (John 3:13, 31; 6:32, 33, 38); where after His resurrection and ascension “He sitteth at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (a.t. [Heb. 8:1]) and appears in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb. 9:24); and where a reward is reserved for the righteous (Matt. 5:12; 1 Pet. 1:4).

(III) The heavens are used metonymically of God in the OT (2 Chr. 32:20 [cf. 2 Kgs. 19:25; Is. 37:15, 16; Dan. 4:23, 28]). *Ouranós*, heaven, is used with the same sense in the NT (Matt. 21:25; Mark 11:30, 31; Luke 15:18, 21; 20:4, 5; John 3:27). Thus, the kingdom of the heavens, or heaven, is syn. with the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:23, 24).

(IV) In 2 Cor. 12:2, Paul was raptured to the third heaven and returned. This is called Paradise (12:4) which is applied to the state of the faithful souls between death and the resurrection where they are admitted to immediate communion with God in Christ, and to a partaking of the true Tree of Life which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Luke 22:43; Rev. 2:7).

(V) There is a final heaven which in Heb. 11:16 is referred to as a better or a heavenly country; in 13:14 as a continuing city; and in Rev. 21:2 the holy city, new Jerusalem. It is the place where the believers are going to receive their inheritance which is incorruptible (1 Pet. 1:3–5). See also Matt. 6:19, 20; 1 Cor. 2:9; Col. 3:2; Rev. 21:1–5. Consult a Gr. concordance for the rest of the references.

Deriv.: *epouránios* (2032), heavenly, what pertains to or is in heaven; *ouránios* (3770), heavenly; *ouranóthen* (3771), from heaven; *messouránēma* (3321), mid-heaven, the midst of the heavens.

Syn.: *parádeisos* (3857), paradise.

Ant.: *gḗ* (1093), earth; *geénna* (1067), hell, everlasting punishment; *hádēs* (86), the state or place of departed spirits.¹

A wealthy and prominent Nicodemus is known in Jerusalem in this period, though we cannot be sure that John means the same one. As a highly educated “ruler” or leader in the Jewish community, John’s Nicodemus was surely well-to-do.

3:2. One might come by night to avoid being seen, or because Jewish teachers who worked during the day could study only at night (cf. Ps 119:148; the latter was undoubtedly not the case with Nicodemus, who would not need to work—v. 1). But John includes the

¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

detail because it serves the theme of light and darkness (11:10; 13:30) that brackets this narrative (3:19–21).

3:3–4. Jesus speaks literally of being born “from above,” which means “from God” (“above” was a Jewish circumlocution, or roundabout expression, for God). One could also construe the phrase as meaning “reborn,” which Nicodemus takes literally. (Ancient writers, including those of the Old Testament—Jer 1:11–12; Mic 1:10–15—often used plays on words, and John includes quite a few other puns; they also sometimes used other characters as less intelligent foils for a narrative’s main spokesperson.) Because Jewish teachers spoke of Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like “newborn children” (just as adopted sons under Roman law relinquished all legal status in their former family when they became part of a new one), Nicodemus should have understood that Jesus meant conversion; but it never occurs to him that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel.

3:5. Converts to Judaism were said to become “as newborn children” when they were baptized to remove Gentile impurity. “Born of water” thus clarifies for Nicodemus that “born from above” means conversion, not a second physical birth.

The Greek wording of 3:5 can mean either “water and the Spirit” or “water, that is, the Spirit.” Ezekiel 36:24–27 used water symbolically for the cleansing of the Spirit (cf. especially the Dead Sea Scrolls), so here Jesus could mean “converted by the Spirit” (cf. 7:37–39)—a *spiritual* proselyte baptism. Whereas Jewish teachers generally spoke of converts to Judaism as “newborn” only in the sense that they were legally severed from old relationships, an actual rebirth by the Spirit would produce a new heart (Ezek 36:26).

3:6–7. The “spirit” that is born from God’s Spirit may reflect the “new spirit” of Ezekiel 36:26.

3:8. One could also translate “sound of the wind” as “voice of the Spirit” (for plays on words, see comment on 3:3–4). The wind is unpredictable and uncontrollable (see Eccles 8:8; cf. Eccles 1:6, 8, 14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). The Spirit was symbolized as wind in Ezekiel 37, which some Jewish interpreters linked with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).

3:9–21

The Revealer from Above

Jesus as incarnate Wisdom (see comment on 1:1–18) is the only one fully qualified to reveal God and reconcile the world to him.

3:9–10. Nicodemus’s denseness makes him a foil for Jesus the revealer. For this theme in some ancient literature, see the discussion of Mark’s message in the introduction to Mark.

3:11–13. Only an eyewitness of heaven could fully testify about heaven. Jewish literature provides other parallels to John 3:11–13, but the closest are Jewish texts that speak of divine Wisdom coming down from God, seeking to reveal the ways of heaven (God) to people. Jesus may imply a contrast with the Jewish tradition that Moses ascended not only Mount Sinai but up into heaven to receive God’s law; now Wisdom/Word/Law has come down from heaven in the flesh (see comment on 1:14–18).

3:14–15. “Lifting up” is another play on words (3:3–4): Jesus returns to heaven by way of the cross, “lifted up” like the serpent Moses lifted up to bring healing (Num 21:4–9; for “lifting up” see comment on Jn 12:32–33).

3:16–18. The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate the sense: “This is how God loved the world: he gave his son.” “Only begotten” is literally “special, beloved,” and was often applied in Jewish literature to Isaac, to emphasize the greatness of Abraham’s sacrifice in offering him up. Eternal life is literally the “life of the world to come”; John’s present tense (“have”) indicates that those who trust Jesus begin to experience that life already in the present time.

Despite ancient Jewish literature’s mention of God’s love for humanity and its emphasis on God’s special love for Israel, nothing compares with this sacrifice, especially not for “the

world,” which in John normally means those not yet following God’s will. The Old Testament also emphasizes God’s immeasurable love (e.g., Ex 34:6–7; Deut 7:7–8; Judg 10:16; Is 63:9; Hos 11:1–4, 8–11; cf. Is 16:11; Jer 48:36).

3:19–21. Ancient texts (especially the Dead Sea Scrolls) often contrast light and darkness as good and evil in the same way John does here. Everyone would have understood John’s point. Bracketing off a narrative by starting and ending on the same point (3:2) was an ancient literary device.

3:22–36²

This is why God sent his Son: so that none would perish but all come to repentance. (John 3:3, 7, 16-21)

Jesus is God’s plan and the way into the new heavens and new earth.

- By embracing Jesus, you embrace God’s plan for your life and the world, and have free entrance into God’s Kingdom.
- Jesus is the gate.

Heaven, not up in the clouds, but heaven on earth. And specifically a new earth, an earth that has been resurrected and glorified like Jesus’ body after the cross. It’s a new heaven and earth that have been born again, but still have all the good features of this heaven and earth.

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Jn 3:1–36). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.