**‘The New Creation’ – Theology Breakfast, 14/03/18**

*What comes to mind when you think of ‘heaven’?*

*How does the idea of the ‘new heavens and new earth’ relate to your idea of ‘heaven’?*

**The Current Heaven**

In the Bible we often read about this place called ‘heaven’ – sometimes also called ‘paradise’. So Isaiah chapter 66 starts with God speaking and saying “Heaven is my throne”, and in the new testament, when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he tells them to start by saying “our father in heaven, hallowed be your name”. When the bible talks about heaven, it talks about a real place, where God himself is; where he dwells.

And it goes further than this. When Jesus goes up into heaven after his death and resurrection, the disciples are looking up into the sky and 2 angels appear and tell them “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Heaven is where God the father dwells, and is where the risen Jesus has gone to, and where he will be until he returns.

And when Christians die, it’s pretty clear that Heaven is where they immediately go. So Jesus, on the cross, says to the thief next to Him “today you will be with me in paradise”. And Paul writes “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” – when Paul dies, he will be with Christ, who himself is in heaven.

Heaven is the place where God the father dwells, it’s where Christ is now, and it’s where Christians go, apart from our bodies when we die. A useful way to think about heaven is as “the place where God most makes known his presence to bless” – where his blessings are most fully made know. That means it’s a good and sinless place, better than the world we know now, because it is where God’s blessing is most fully made known. When we go there, freed from sin by the blood of Christ, we will experience his presence to bless and respond in worship. It will be better than our lives now, because we will be with Christ…

But we will be away from our bodies, away from our physical being. And yet we are physical, embodied people – that’s how God created and formed us - and so to be away from the body is not to be fully human. It will be better to be with Christ, but without bodies how will we experience, know and worship Christ with all of ourselves?

**The New Creation**

This morning’s main topic is the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth. At the end of John’s vision in Revelation, after Jesus return, after the millennium, judgement, final defeat of the evil one, there is a resurrection of the dead, and John sees a new creation.

This means that heaven as we’ve been talking about so far is only temporary; it’s not the final destination, it’s not our ultimate hope. We were created to be physical, embodied people; in heaven as it is now we will be disembodied. Yes we long to be with Christ, but our ultimate hope and confidence is in a physical world to come, a new creation where we will be both with Christ and in our physical bodies. This is the new creation which is promised in the bible.

*1 Corinthians 15:20-21, 42-44, Isaiah 25:6-8, Revelation 22:1-5*

If you flip over your sheets now, there are three passages printed there, which contain some of the bible’s teaching on the new creation. [split into 3]. Have a chat about how these passages help us understand the new creation

[report back]: let’s have someone summarise what the passage was about, and then some of what the passage tells us about ‘the new creation’.

A Physical and Renewed place

The world that we live in is like a glorious ruin – it’s like the ruins of a great castle which you walk round and still see the architecture, the carvings, the heights it once reached. You imagine the armies it once stood strong against. But now as you walk round you see the crumbling walls, the effect of time and rot on the greatness that once was. That’s like our experience of this world. We *can* see the underlying goodness of the world, the pleasure of good food and the best wine, of spending time with other people. But we also see the effect of sin on this world – food goes off and can be bad for us, relationships break down.

The promise of the bible is of a renewing of creation. The good things which physical food and drink point to will be there *in their fullness* in the new creation; with the removal of all the rot and sin that corrupts. When we get to the Revelation passage we see an image of the tree of life, a reference to Eden, to how things were meant to be – and this tree brings healing to the nations. All the pain, all the discord, all the disease is healed. God renews his creation.

And this renewing also includes our physical bodies, as we saw in the 1 Corinthians passage. We will have real, physical bodies. When we look at the risen Jesus in the bible we see a glimpse of what that will be like. He was touchable, he was recognisably him, he was eating and drinking. Christ is the firstfruits of the new creation, the firstborn from among the dead, and just as he was physically raised, so we will be also.

Creation was originally very good, but since the fall evil has scarred it. But we now look forward to creation’s physical renewal, not escape from it. This radically affirms the goodness of the physical creation, something christians sometimes get wrong.

A Perfected People

As we’ve seen humanity is part of that new creation. In Revelation 21, the focus of the chapter is on the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, and we’re told the city comes as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. Throughout the bible, Jerusalem represented God’s people. In the New Testament, God’s people – the church – are described as the bride of Christ. This, this new creation, is the fulfilment of the entire bible, and its fulfilment is the restoration of God’s people, the perfection of God’s people.

We need to get away from the idea that the new creation is about each of us being in our individual spiritual bliss with God. The picture here is of a community; a people from every tribe and tongue and nation united together as God meant us to be, and perfected in our holiness.

The Lord, like a father, will wipe the tears from our eyes, he will remove all our disgrace, and there will no longer be any curse. The curse that was spoken against humanity for the sin in the garden will be removed. We will be a perfected people.

The Best Place

I think this may have come through a bit in what I’ve said already, but the new creation is going to be good. It’s the best things can be, and that’s the main point of the passages, of what the bible tells us about the new creation. But what makes the new creation good is not the physicality, and not the fact that we will be free from sin. What makes it good is the perfection of relationship with God.

At the beginning we spoke about the current, temporary heaven being the place where he most fully makes known his presence to bless. That will also be true of the new creation – near the end of the Revelation passage we read some of what that means. It says “his name will be on their foreheads” and “they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.” Later in the passage from 1 Corinthians it simply says “God will be all in all”. He will be present in every place, in all His fullness.

The current heaven is a disembodied place. In the new creation we will be embodied and free from sin. We will see God face to face. Our relationship with God as our God will be perfected. It will be the place where he most fully makes known his presence to bless, yes, but it will also be the place where we are most fully able to experience and enjoy him. We long for the new creation not because it is a wonderful, harmonious place, but because it is where we are with God. It’s the wonderful place it is, because of him.

So we’ve covered quite a lot there. Does anyone have any questions about what we’ve spoken about so far?

Application

The new creation gives great hope, because it means this life is not all there is. Use it to motivate you to live a godly life now.

It also means there is great incentive to invest in what the bible sometimes talks about as ‘the work of the Lord’; that is, building up the church. Telling people about the coming hope, and encouraging those who have heard to continue and press on.

The new creation is going to be good, so long for it. Long for it! Know that the world at the moment is not all there is, and is not the best things can get. Pray that the new creation would come soon – and have hope and confidence, that it will come.

If you need to run off to lectures, do so - if you could put £1 or some other amount for breakfast in the pot it would be helpful. Otherwise, take some time now to discuss of the final 2 questions on the sheet and then it would be good to spend some time praying.

*In what ways has this chapter made you more excited about enter the heavenly creation?*

*What effect on your life do you think having a stronger longing for the new creation might have?*