

IMAGINE HEAVEN

1 Corinthians 15:50 Imagine Heaven Part One: Top of Your Game, No Sickness, No Sin, No Suffering, Sharing Meals, A Resurrected Body

What Jesus' resurrection body tells us about our own

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, September 6, 2020
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 15:49-55; 1 John 3:2; John 20:15-17; John 20:26-29; John 21:17-19; Luke 24:39-43; Philippians 3:20-21; Daniel 12:2-3; Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 2:2; Ephesians 2:8-9
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:02:32 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The best window we have into heaven is the risen Jesus. He came back from the grave in a real body – recognizable but not exactly the same, able to walk through a locked door and still eat broiled fish. “We shall be like him.” Heaven is the renewal of all things, our bodies and minds included, and looking forward to it frees us from the fear of death and sharpens how we spend this life.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Talking about heaven is practical: it takes away the fear of death, gives purpose to a finite life, and opens our imagination to what we have to look forward to.
- ◆ Three bad ideas about heaven – an endless worship service, disembodied spirits on clouds, and a place so strange we will be uncomfortable – are none of them remotely true.

- ◆ We will bear the image of “the man of heaven” – not the ghost of heaven, but a redeemed, resurrected body and mind, at the top of our game, with no sickness, sin or sorrow.
- ◆ Every resurrection appearance shows continuity, but not exact continuity: Mary, the Emmaus disciples and the others recognize Jesus, though not at first.
- ◆ Relationships carry over. Jesus picked up with his friends where he left off, so our walk with him now matters in the next life.
- ◆ Only Jesus will keep his scars in heaven – marks of honor that show him as the Lamb who redeemed us.
- ◆ Everyone carries a splinter in the mind that says the world is not as it should be. That longing is a hunger for Eden, and Jesus came to restore it and more.

► 1:02:32

After pointing the church to an upcoming teaching on freedom from pornography – “nobody likes to talk about pornography,” which is exactly why it needed talking about – Geno opened a four-week series on heaven he had been working on for a long time.

Why talk about the by-and-by in the here and now?

► 1:06:42

His goal was that the church would look forward to the day the Lord takes us home and no longer be afraid of it. “Come on, pastor, give me something practical.” Fair challenge, he said, and gave three reasons.

► 1:07:09

First, many people are simply afraid of death, and for those who believe in Christ there is no need to be. Second, heaven gives purpose to this life. Scripture urges us to consider our end and spend this extremely valuable, extremely finite resource with intent – urging others toward Christ, and remembering Paul’s talk of rewards for how we live.

► 1:09:08

Third, there is a great deal to look forward to, summed up in a phrase Jesus and Paul both use: all things will be made new – “our bodies, our minds, our environment, our relationships.”

Three bad ideas about heaven

► 1:09:45

The most common is an unending worship service. “Holy smoke, who wants that forever? Send me somewhere else.” The second is that we will be disembodied spirits, maybe cherubs, floating on clouds with golden harps – “I’ve never played a harp.” And the third is that heaven will be so strange and unfamiliar that we will be uncomfortable, with no one we want to talk to. “None of those bad ideas about heaven are even remotely true.”

What we have to look forward to

► 1:11:56

Simple things, first: walking and talking with people we know and love, as the risen Jesus did with his friends.

► 1:12:34

We will enjoy the restoration of our strength and our minds. It is hard to imagine being at the top of your game physically and mentally with no lapses – “there won’t be any doddering old people in heaven.” Sickness follows sin, and in heaven there is neither. No depression, no discouragement, no broken relationships – nearly impossible to picture. So he urged a vivid imagination – not to replace the truth, but because “your imagination is a gift to you from God,” and we will not grasp the truth’s ramifications without it.

► 1:14:57

We will share meals. Many people spiritualize the marriage supper of the Lamb, and if we are floating spirits, food makes no sense. But resurrected bodies sit down to meals with people they love, which restores us physically and emotionally. “That’s how God made us. He did not make a mistake when he made us that way.”

► 1:16:25

We will tell stories, maybe with memories restored. We may sit in classes with people who were wonderful teachers and inventors on earth – Geno mentioned Madame Curie – who will be learning new things too. Culture and artists in heaven? “Yes, absolutely, that’s what I believe.”

1. We shall be like him

► 1:17:41

Then he narrowed to one thing, the resurrection body, starting with John's letter:

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

1 JOHN 3:2 ↗

► 1:19:03

Over the years, Geno admitted, he had spiritualized this verse and spent most of his time on how seeing Jesus will change us. That is true, but in this study it struck him that John is talking about what we will *become*. And Paul is plainer still: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:49). Adam, then the last Adam. "Notice it's the man of heaven – not the ghost of heaven, not the spirit of heaven – a redeemed, resurrected body, a redeemed, resurrected mind."

2. Four meetings with the risen Jesus

► 1:21:34

Mary Magdalene. Weeping at the empty tomb, she took Jesus for the gardener ([John 20:15–17](#)). There is continuity from this life to the next, Geno said, "but it's not exact," and that holds through every glimpse of heaven we get. Then Jesus said one word – her name – and her heart flooded with relief and joy. She answered, *Rabboni*, and grabbed him – "stop clinging to me" is the better translation; "he had to peel her off of him." She became the first witness of the resurrection.

► 1:23:38

What moved Geno most was that Jesus only had to say her name. "I'm looking forward to the day when I wake up in the presence of Jesus and I hear my name spoken – *Geno*. It's been such a dark glass between us, lo these many years."

► 1:24:15

Thomas. Eight days later, with the doors locked, Jesus stood among the disciples and said, "Peace be with you" – "he had to say peace be with you, because the dude walked into a room that was locked." Then he showed Thomas his hands and side.

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

JOHN 20:26–29 ↗

► 1:25:28

A body, then, but not exactly like ours, and yet recognizable. And yes, there will be scars in heaven, Geno said, “but only Jesus will have them.” He expects our bodies to be completely restored, but Jesus’ scars remain because they mark our redemption and him as the Lamb of God. “They’re marks of honor.”

► 1:26:38

Peter. Weeks after everything they had seen, the disciples had gone back to fishing, and Jesus was on the shore with a breakfast of broiled fish. A risen body that appears in locked rooms can also cook and eat. Then came the three questions – “Do you love me?” – and Peter’s grief, and the commission to feed his sheep, and the call to follow ([John 21:17–19](#)).

► 1:29:16

The lesson Geno drew was relationship. Jesus carried his friendships into his resurrected life; he remembered, and he engaged his disciples in familiar ways. “Our engagement with Jesus in this life will matter in the next.”

► 1:29:46

The road to Emmaus. Two travelers asked a stranger, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know?” – and it was Jesus, recognized only when he broke bread. As they told the disciples, Jesus himself stood among them. “At this point I think Jesus is a practical joker,” Geno said. “I think Jesus is really enjoying the moment.”

► 1:32:05

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ ... They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.”

LUKE 24:39–43 ↗

► 1:32:48

Flesh and bones, in a body that can do amazing things. “Don’t ask me – I don’t have a theory about that.” Our experience trains us to see only the familiar, Geno said; when something goes beyond what we can absorb, we just do not see it.

3. Fully functional image bearers

► 1:34:05

Geno read from Randy Alcorn, whose book on heaven he called the best layman’s guide: “The fact that Jesus picked up his relationships where they left off is a foretaste of our own lives after we are resurrected,” with the same memories and relational histories. And again: because of the fall, “we have never seen human beings who are fully functional as God’s image bearers.”

► 1:35:52

That is what Peter, James and John glimpsed at the transfiguration. Nobody knows how they recognized Moses and Elijah, but they did. In heaven, Geno thinks, we will know people – we will not be numb among strangers.

► 1:36:22

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:20–21 ↗

► 1:36:53

“That’s a promise you can take to the bank.” Daniel saw the same end of all things: many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame, and the wise “shall shine like the brightness of the sky above” (Daniel 12:2–3). “Wow, what a day that will be.”

4. The splinter in the mind

► 1:37:27

Everyone carries a sense that the world is not the way it ought to be – that we are broken in ways we cannot articulate, that the love we thought would last forever did not. Like Neo in *The Matrix*, there is a splinter in the brain we cannot get to. Every writer on heaven Geno had read calls it a hunger to return to Eden – though “return” is the wrong word, he said: “I want to move forward into that.”

► 1:39:56

Jesus shared our humanity without sin – or better, we share his humanity in a broken version. And he is a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). He came to set us free.

► 1:40:32

“We are survivors of the wreckage of Eden,” wrote John Eldredge. Sin drives a wedge between us and God, one another, even ourselves. Jesus’ work is restoration as well as redemption – to what God intended for Adam and Eve, and better, with billions of sons and daughters at peace. Alister McGrath calls the longing to re-enter paradise integral to the doctrine of creation. And Eldredge again: Jesus announced the kingdom, then demonstrated what it means – the crippled walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, the dead are raised. “The kingdom of God means a great restoration, the renewal of all things.”

How do I make heaven my own?

► 1:43:49

Geno said he would be remiss to say all this without answering the obvious question. Our sins have driven a wedge between us and God – “we haven’t hurt his feelings; we’ve offended him.” Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2): he turned away God’s wrath by taking our punishment. His death was a ransom, the price paid for a slave, purchasing our freedom and our restoration to wholeness.

► 1:45:45

We did nothing to deserve it and can do nothing to make it happen. “All I have to do is say I trust that Jesus did what he said he did? That’s too easy.” Yes, it is. “The word for that is grace” – saved by grace through faith, not by works ([Ephesians 2:8–9](#)), a gift free to us and eternally costly to Christ. Alcorn again: “We were born with our autopilot set to hell.” Receiving Christ is how you turn it off and turn toward heaven.

► 1:47:06

He finished with the end of Paul’s great resurrection chapter:

“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed... Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50–55 ↗

► 1:48:53

“All of that was taken out in the sacrifice of Jesus for us.” Geno led anyone at a distance from God in a simple prayer of thanks and trust, asked them to tell somebody, and stepped down to pray with anyone who wanted it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 John 3:2
- 1 Corinthians 15:49
- John 20:15–17
- John 20:26–29
- John 21:17–19
- Luke 24:39–43
- Matthew 17:1–8
- Philippians 3:20–21
- Daniel 12:2–3
- Hebrews 4:15
- 1 John 2:2
- Ephesians 2:8–9
- 1 Corinthians 15:50–55

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which of the three bad ideas about heaven – endless church service, harps on clouds, or uncomfortably strange – has shaped your own picture most, and how?
2. Geno argued that thinking about heaven gives purpose to a finite life. What would change in how you spend your time if you took that seriously?
3. In the resurrection appearances there is continuity, “but not exact.” Which of the four encounters – Mary, Thomas, Peter or Emmaus – speaks most to what you hope for, and why?
4. How does the idea that Jesus carried his friendships into his risen life change the way you think about your relationship with him now?
5. Where do you feel the “splinter” that says the world is not as it should be, and how could the hope of the renewal of all things shape how you face it this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt preached this message as the first of four September 2020 talks on heaven, a study he said he had worked on for a long time. At the same service he announced a teaching on freedom from pornography and a panel he would moderate with Hope's men's and women's ministry leaders. He credits Randy Alcorn's book on heaven as the best layman's guide to the subject.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnrJI87Npog&t=3752s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.