

IMAGINE HEAVEN

Heaven – Echoes of the Garden, End of Suffering, Freedom Unimaginable

Five ways sin broke us, and five ways heaven makes them new

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, September 13, 2020
PASSAGES	Revelation 21:2-5; Genesis 3:6-8; John 14:23; Exodus 19:5-6; Genesis 3:17; Genesis 2:16-17; John 5:14; Revelation 22:3-5; John 13:34-35; Romans 8:19-23; Isaiah 61:1; Psalm 103:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:42-43; Ephesians 1:11
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:05:28 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

What God has wanted from the beginning is to dwell among a people who love him – it is what Adam and Eve had in the garden and what we are finally called to in heaven. Sin broke five things: our relationship with God, with one another, with creation, with ourselves, and the health of our bodies. Heaven is where all five are made new.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ♦ The most important line in the story of the fall is that God was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. His plan has always been “God with us,” and the new Jerusalem is that plan fulfilled.
- ♦ Eating from the tree was a declaration of independence from God, and into the gulf it opened came fear, grief and confusion that Adam and Eve had never felt before.
- ♦ Every human relationship still carries some distance. As Henri Nouwen put it, in every embrace there is loneliness.
- ♦ Our connection to creation is corrupted but not gone, and creation itself groans, waiting for our redemption so that it can be set free.

- ◆ We were not designed for anxiety, shame, depression or dementia. Grief, like a struck spider web, makes us feel every old loss again.
- ◆ In heaven we will not merely stop fighting each other; we will cheer each other on – “What a glory you are.”
- ◆ “Behold, I am making all things new” is a promise to take to the bank: no more tears, death, mourning or pain.

► 1:05:28

After praying over a citywide thirty-day prayer effort, Geno thanked Thomas Cogdell for leading it, urged people toward that Saturday’s teaching on freedom from pornography – “nobody wants to talk about it,” but it is a tragedy for the nation and a blight on the body of Christ – and then returned to his series on heaven with a line from Will Rogers: “If there are no dogs in heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.” Geno happens to believe there will be dogs in heaven. But this week was about us.

God’s plan: to dwell with his people

► 1:08:29

God works all things according to the counsel of his will ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). What is the plan? “To dwell amongst a people who honor him, who love him, who respond to him, who give him glory” – to be their God as they are his people. It is what we had in the garden, what God called Israel to, and what we are finally called to in heaven. Sin disrupted it, so Geno started where it went off track.

► 1:10:00

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked... And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

GENESIS 3:6–8 ↗

► 1:11:01

“That’s the most important thing for the sermon today. Here comes God, walking, looking for Adam and Eve.” It was apparently their routine. They hid, futilely, and God asked “Where are you?” – not because he did not know, but looking for honesty. Instead came the blame game: “The woman you gave me.” “The serpent deceived me.” Geno was less interested in what Adam and Eve did than in what God intended: to walk with his people, to be Immanuel.

► 1:12:36

Jesus echoed it in the upper room: “we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). And it comes to fruition when the new Jerusalem descends – a key text, Geno said, he would come back to every time he talked about heaven:

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

REVELATION 21:2-3 ↗

An echo of [Exodus 19](#), and an echo of the garden.

1. Five ways sin broke us

► 1:14:24

Our relationship with God. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were content for God to tell them what was good and evil. It was not ignorance; it was trust, and communion so deep that those questions never absorbed them. Eating from the tree was a declaration of independence. A gulf opened between them and the one who protected, provided for and loved them, and into it rushed things they had never felt: fear (“I was afraid”), grief and loss, confusion. Scholars note that the story was not “boom, boom, boom” – a great deal of time passed between creation and temptation – so this came all at once on souls that had known only peace. “It was an unimaginable, horrific experience.”

► 1:18:06

Our relationship with each other. Geno and PJ have spent years reading the Bible with Chinese graduate students. The first time through Genesis, a young woman reading aloud reached “the woman you gave me” and stopped: “Oh, I don’t like that man.” “You have immediately understood the point of the text,” he told her. Blame, distrust, disappointment – and by the next generation, Cain killed Abel. He quoted Henri Nouwen: “In every embrace there is loneliness, in every friendship distance.” Even the closest friends and spouses never meld perfectly. “That’s the effect of the fall.”

► 1:21:00

Our relationship with the environment. “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:17). The ground no longer cooperates. We are still profoundly connected to nature, but the connection is corrupted, and we keep ruining the earth we need to live. He cited a study in *Nature* finding “very high concentrations of microplastics” in the top 200 meters of the Atlantic – an estimated 12 to 20 million metric tons. “This is what we have done to nature. It’s really wrong.”

► 1:23:03

Our relationship with ourselves. “Human beings were not designed to live with anxiety or shame or grief or depression or panic attacks or schizophrenia or dementia.” At a recent Tuesday Bible chat, a local psychologist had described trauma and loss as points on a spider web: when a new loss strikes, it shakes the whole web and we feel every old one again. John Eldredge says the same: grief “opens the door to the room in your soul where all your other grief is stored.”

► 1:25:42

Our bodies. Internal suffering often becomes physical, and there is simply sickness in the world. Jesus loosely tied sin and sickness together when he told the man healed at Bethesda, “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (John 5:14). God had warned that “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17). They lived physically, but they died in every relationship, and physical sickness followed. One “backward positive” of the coronavirus era, Geno thought, has been a humbling about how far our science reaches: “We are not in control of this planet.”

2. What heaven holds

► 1:28:01

“Okay, pastor, that’s all pretty dark and pretty grim. Can you cheer us up a little bit?” Yes. Go back through the list.

► 1:28:37

With God, fully restored. Read the first two and last two chapters of the Bible together, Geno said.

“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

REVELATION 22:3–5 ↗

► 1:29:11

Everyone you meet will bear his name. “What’s your name? Oh, my name is Cindy. Oh, I see Jesus in you.” We will bear his image properly, perhaps for the first time, with no veil and no looking through a glass darkly – “the thrill of a lifetime, of an eternity, to be in the presence of God in a renewed body and a renewed mind and a renewed soul.”

► 1:30:56

With one another, fully restored. Jesus said our love for one another shows we are his disciples (John 13:34–35). Now imagine it without sin: no jealousy, fear or offense, just open and happy to see each other. Someone has written that we will look at one another and say, “What a glory you are.” And it is more than the end of hostility. “We will be supporting one another, encouraging one another. We’ll be saying, go for it. How can I serve the purposes of God in your life?” Resurrected people on a resurrected earth, enjoying a resurrected Christ – with no need to hide ever again.

► 1:32:51

The earth, restored with us. “You go, what, Geno, you come up with some weird things. I do, but I’m also following the Bible.”

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

ROMANS 8:19–23 ↗

► 1:34:08

Creation is not what God intended; things do not grow or act as they should. Geno mused that with sin gone, dolphins might leap out of the water and say, “Hi Thomas, how are you?” – “I want to be there.” Creation groans in agony, waiting for humanity’s redemption so it can be fully what God intended. Our redemption and the earth’s are bound together; the new heaven comes down to a new earth, cleansed by fire. To picture it, we have to imagine everything new at once, which is why it is so hard to imagine.

► 1:37:08

Ourselves, at peace. Imagine not only your own peace but someone you love who suffered deeply from mental illness, or could not communicate, or stared at you blankly because they could not remember your name – restored to fullness of strength, no longer confined to a wheelchair or a walker. “I’ve

known so many broken people, broken in their bodies and their minds, and to see them restored – that to me is amazing.” Eldredge: at the renewal of all things our hearts will be free from grief. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted ([Isaiah 61:1](#)), a promise not yet fully fulfilled.

► 1:38:10

No ill health in heaven. Then one of Geno’s favorite passages of all time – one that always made him think, “that’s not quite happened yet”:

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

PSALM 103:1-5 ↗

► 1:40:01

Most medieval theologians held that everyone in heaven would be thirty. “You may think, well, that’s really old, I’d rather be twenty-two. Oh, who cares?” In his sixties, Geno would take twenty years back gladly – but heaven promises more: not just freedom from illness but a vital, strong mind, body and soul. “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” ([1 Corinthians 15:42-43](#)).

► 1:41:24

He told of being called to pray over a young woman in her late twenties, the daughter of old friends from the early days of his faith, who contracted bacterial meningitis. Her life was saved, but both legs were amputated above the knee and one arm above the elbow – a vibrant young woman made an invalid overnight, deeply wounded in her soul. He sat with her parents for days as they contended for her in prayer. “This one really stung.” Stories like that make him cry out, God, bring an end to this suffering. “Dearly beloved, that’s the promise of heaven. The promise is much more than that, but it’s at least that.”

3. All things new

► 1:43:25

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

REVELATION 21:4-5 ↗

► 1:43:59

“Write it down. Take it to the bank,” Geno said. “A day is coming when all things will be made new” – every way we have been broken, every loss, every havoc sin has created, wiped away when Christ returns and we go home to be with him forever.

► 1:44:53

He prayed that the church would be men and women of faith and hope who live in light of eternity – who can say without embarrassment, “I love Jesus, I can’t wait to be with him,” and answer anyone who calls that crazy: “You have no idea what’s in store. It’s amazing.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Ephesians 1:11
- Genesis 3:6–8
- John 14:23
- Revelation 21:2–3
- Exodus 19:5–6
- Genesis 3:17
- John 5:14
- Genesis 2:16–17
- Revelation 22:3–5
- John 13:34–35
- Romans 8:19–23
- Isaiah 61:1
- Psalm 103:1–5
- 1 Corinthians 15:42–43
- Revelation 21:4–5

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno called God walking in the garden “the most important thing” in Genesis 3. How does seeing God’s plan as dwelling with his people change the way you read the story of the fall?
2. Which of the five breaks – with God, with others, with creation, with yourself, with your body – do you feel most sharply right now?
3. Henri Nouwen wrote that “in every embrace there is loneliness.” Where have you felt that, and what would it mean to have it healed?
4. What would it look like to start practicing heaven’s kind of relationships now, where we say to each other, “What a glory you are,” and ask how we can serve God’s purposes in someone else’s life?
5. Who is someone whose suffering you long to see ended, and how could the promise of “all things new” shape the way you pray for and with them this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt describes himself in this message as serving Hope Chapel “as a senior leader.” This was the second of his September 2020 talks on heaven. He mentions years spent, with PJ, reading the Bible with Chinese graduate students who had never encountered the Christian faith, and as a pastor he has prayed with many people in suffering. He says he is in his sixties.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AN05vTHPpw&t=3928s>

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.