

IMAGINE HEAVEN

Romans 8:15 What Will We Do in Eternity?

Dominion restored, culture renewed, and the imprint of the Spirit

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, September 27, 2020
PASSAGES	Hebrews 2:5-9; Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 11:1-9; Revelation 5:9-10; Romans 8:15-17; Genesis 4:17-22; Revelation 19:11; Romans 8:19-22
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:13:29 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God gave humanity dominion over creation, sin cracked it, and in Christ it is given back – not to two people but to millions. So eternity will be full of work that fits us: tending a renewed earth, making culture with every tribe, language and people, under the uncontested rule of Christ. And the people who will be there are those on whom Jesus has been imprinted by the Spirit of adoption.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The picture of bored angels plucking harps on clouds has nothing in Scripture behind it. “Not one thing.”
- ◆ The creation mandate – be fruitful, fill the earth, have dominion – is responsibility as well as authority, and it has not left the heart of God.
- ◆ We do not yet see everything in subjection to humanity – just say fire ants – but we see Jesus, and in him our dominion is restored.
- ◆ The Bible moves from a garden to a city, because people pushed together make culture. Heaven will be full of culture, cleansed of sin.

- ◆ The new song of the redeemed is rich with cultural markers – song, tribe, language, people, nation. We will keep our identities and our heritage.
- ◆ Isaiah's wolf and lamb are not just a word picture. If the Messiah in that passage is real, so is the shalom he brings to creation.
- ◆ The Spirit of adoption "imprints" Jesus on our hearts, and every friend of Jesus will be in heaven with him.

► 1:13:29

It was a Sunday of repentance across the nation, and Thomas Cogdell had just led the room – some kneeling at the altar – in bringing to the cross sins drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. Geno thanked him, said it was good for Hope as one segment of the body of Christ to join others in prayer and repentance, and then told a story about cantaloupes.

A cantaloupe in the new earth

► 1:15:15

In the first year of their marriage, living in Lockhart, Geno and PJ were given a plot of thick, black clay soil. They planted tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon and cantaloupe. Everything died except the cantaloupes, which – wrong soil and all – came up thick, juicy and astonishingly sweet. That hooked him on gardening. "PJ is the green thumb. I'm the guy that hauls the dirt." Best served, he added, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream in the middle.

► 1:17:02

Closing his series on heaven, he found himself wondering: what will it be like to grow a cantaloupe in the new earth, working land with no curse on it? Not everyone will garden, he said, but Scripture teaches that the dominion Adam and Eve lost is restored to human beings in Christ. So what will we do in eternity? Be bored angels plucking harps on a cloud? "There's nothing in the Scripture – not one thing – that gives us that idea."

1. The creation mandate

► 1:18:39

God does nothing apart from his plan, so start at the beginning:

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

GENESIS 1:28 ↗

► 1:19:11

Scholars call it the creation mandate. It is responsibility, not just authority – “we’re meant to steward God’s green earth into even greater fruitfulness,” with the tools and wisdom to work the land and care for the animals, so that the vitality God put into creation would fill the earth. Geno expects something like it again in the new heavens and new earth, which will need to be repopulated and refilled. “That’s a nice theory, Geno. Can you back it up? Well, I typically don’t bring you nice theories without some backup.”

► 1:20:55

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.”

PSALM 8:3–6 ↗

2. Dominion cracked, and restored in Christ

► 1:22:07

But is creation really under our feet? Do we have dominion over volcanoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, viruses, mosquitoes – fire ants? The pandemic has humbled our trust in medical science, wonderful as it is. In many ways we live in “miserable subjection to the earth.” Dominion, as a result of sin, is a cracked and flawed idea. “But the beauty of this is that our dominion is returned to us in Christ.”

► 1:23:40

“For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him...?’ ... At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

HEBREWS 2:5-9 ↗

► 1:24:23

“It has been testified somewhere” – “so when a preacher says ‘I know it says somewhere,’ don’t be too hard on him. The Bible does that.” Geno pointed out that the first “him” is still Adam: we do not yet see everything subject to humanity, “or we would say, fire ant, may your sting not hurt.” Then the subject turns to Jesus. We gained dominion in Genesis, lost it in the fall, and regain it in Christ – not dominion apart from God, but in him. And not to two people, “but to millions and millions,” redeemed representatives exercising dominion as faithful stewards. How would Jesus plant a garden? Cantaloupes, surely, among other things. Would he raise chinchillas? “I don’t know.”

3. From the garden to the city

► 1:26:49

Scripture never spells out what Adam and Eve did in the garden. But almost nobody lives in a garden now, and we are not going back to one. “We are going to a city.” Not only because so many people will be there, but because people pushed together create culture. So what will we do in heaven? Recreate culture – familiar culture, without its sin – and share it with people who lived long ago. Geno wants to ask the ancient Egyptians how they built the pyramids. “Come over here, and I’ll walk you through it.”

► 1:28:24

The first markers come right after the fall. Cain built a city. Jabal fathered those who live in tents with livestock; Jubal, “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” – “instrument guy, singer guy, artist guy”; Tubal-cain forged bronze and iron (Genesis 4:17-22). Geno believes all of that will be repeated in heaven, and said he is far from the only one who thinks so.

4. We keep our identities

► 1:30:16

We will be resurrected in new bodies, but we will keep our essential personhood. “I will be in heaven and I’ll say, oh, that’s Thomas Cogdell. Yes, he’s the really bright one over there.” The same, but

different, and without sin. Our personal culture, the culture we grew up in, our families, will not be stripped away. The idea that we become bodiless spirits comes from Plato, he said, and is closer to Hinduism – pure mind absorbed into the great mind. “The Bible teaches that we will have bodies, and if we have bodies we have identity, and if we have identity we have culture. Yes, there will be rednecks in heaven.” (He stopped himself there: “That next thought was not baptized.”)

► 1:32:22

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’”

REVELATION 5:9–10 ↗

► 1:32:59

“Singing is culture,” Geno had the church repeat. The passage is full of cultural markers. A tribe has its own identity – its own dances, weddings, food and jokes. There will be many languages, because language carries a people’s thought forms. Every “people” means many ethnicities: a hugely hued people along a spectrum, “because God likes that. He’s fascinated by that,” and no color better than another. Kingdom, priesthood and reigning are all culture too.

► 1:35:37

God, who is innately creative, made us to make culture – art, engineering, play. The difference is that all of it will be under Christ’s rule, with no place for sin or injustice. So Geno expects artists, engineers, geophysicists, musicians and mathematicians, and “I do not for one minute believe that we will be bored.” Bodies made for the environment, clear minds, clean hearts, nothing between us and God, and work that fits our gifts. Randy Alcorn: angels could have maintained the world as God created it, “but it takes God’s image bearers to develop, expand and enrich the earth.”

5. Will my dog be in heaven?

► 1:38:05

He ended with a “silly question, or simple question,” and a theory – “so don’t walk out of here saying pastor taught that all dogs are in heaven.” Are there animals in heaven? The King of kings rides out on a white horse at the end of all things ([Revelation 19:11](#)). And there is Isaiah’s messianic picture of a shoot from the stump of Jesse, on whom the Spirit of the Lord rests, who judges the poor with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek.

► 1:42:28

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them... The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

ISAIAH 11:6-9 ↗

► 1:43:06

Some spiritualize this, and Geno thinks that is a mistake. When the Messiah removes wickedness, the shalom of God reaches the animal kingdom: the wolf keeps the lamb warm; the lion lies down beside his former dinner; the young, which every species must work so hard to protect, are never in danger. “You can’t say that’s not real if the first thing is real” – if the Messiah of verse 1 is Jesus, the peace of verse 6 is real too. “The knowledge of the Lord” covering the earth means more than people knowing the Bible: the groaning of creation under sin ([Romans 8](#)) is gone, and the earth is what God intended. “You can have your theory. I’m going to hang on to mine.”

6. Imprinted

► 1:47:23

Thirty years earlier, as a young pastor, Geno was trying to hold the attention of five or six junior-high “little rascals” at a neighborhood Bible study when a big bug – a praying mantis, he thinks – walked past. “Hey pastor, will there be bugs in heaven?” In that moment he knew God had prepared him for the question.

► 1:48:59

The summer before, with PJ and their two small children, he had visited a bald eagle sanctuary in eastern Tennessee. A magnificent eagle sat on its stand, one wing stretched a full six feet; the other had been amputated after a gunshot. The staff explained that they cannot release the birds they nurse back to health, because the birds become imprinted on their caretakers and would keep returning to them for food rather than survive in the wild.

► 1:51:25

So he told the boys he was sure the animals we are imprinted on will be in heaven with us. “And there’s an even more important application,” he said. Every human being bears the image of God, but in heaven will be those who have also been imprinted with the Spirit of Jesus – who have become his friends.

► 1:52:55

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

ROMANS 8:15-17 ↗

► 1:53:32

The Spirit of adoption makes us recognize Jesus as our own and know we belong to him in a way we did not before. “That’s imprinting, if I can say it.” He told the boys that if Jesus is imprinted on your heart, you can be in heaven forever with him – “and your dog” – and for the first time in three weeks they were quiet. When he asked who wanted Jesus imprinted on their hearts, every hand went up.

► 1:55:28

“When I talk about heaven, it’s not an imaginary place to me.” Every friend of Jesus will be there, Geno said – “and we will be surprised about who his friends are” – along with our pets, and all the people we labored over in prayer and conversation who finally said yes. To become his friend is to believe the real Jesus is who he says he is: the Son of the living God, raised from the grave, whose death was for our sake and has been accepted by God, so that we are forgiven and welcomed into the family.

► 1:58:15

Before praying with anyone who wanted to say that yes, he returned to Will Rogers: if dogs don’t go to heaven, I want to go where they went. “I’m here to tell you the dogs are in heaven.” He prayed for the Spirit of adoption to be imprinted on hearts that day – “that I’ll be one of your forever friends, along with my dog.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Genesis 1:28](#)
- [Psalm 8:3–6](#)
- [Hebrews 2:5–9](#)
- [Genesis 4:17–22](#)
- [Revelation 5:9–10](#)
- [Revelation 19:11](#)
- [Isaiah 11:6–9](#)
- [Romans 8:19–22](#)
- [Romans 8:15–17](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno called the creation mandate responsibility, not just authority. What does stewarding the part of God's world you have been given look like now, before the new earth?
2. Hebrews 2 admits we "do not yet see everything in subjection" to us. Where do you feel that most, and how does "but we see Jesus" change it?
3. What part of your own culture or heritage do you hope to bring into heaven, cleansed of sin, and what are you curious to learn from someone else's?
4. How does reading Isaiah 11 as a real promise rather than only a word picture affect your hope for creation?
5. Geno described the Spirit of adoption as Jesus being "imprinted" on our hearts. Who in your life needs to hear about becoming a friend of Jesus, and how could you begin that conversation this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt closed his September 2020 series on heaven with this message. By his own account he is in his mid-sixties, began gardening with his wife PJ in their first year of marriage while living in Lockhart, and was a young pastor ministering to neighborhood children some thirty years before this sermon. He credits Randy Alcorn's Heaven throughout the series.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBpA9SQeRcA&t=4409s>

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.