

### “The Grand Reunion”

**INTRODUCTION:** Death, dying and eternity are subjects most of us do not want to talk about yet all of us will face

1. I remember a comical story told by the preacher, **Stuart Briscoe**, while preaching at a chapel service while I was in seminary... (Elmbrook Church, Milwaukee, WI)
  - a) Dr. Briscoe is an Englishman, and he told of a new experience he had when he moved to America...
  - b) He said that every so often the most friendly men he’s ever met would just stop by his house, ring his doorbell, come in and sit down to visit.
  - c) These men were exceedingly affable, always smiling, and ever so chatty – they asked all about the kids, doted on the dog, let the cat rub up against their legs, and were intensely interested in Stuart’s career church and ministry.
  - d) Briscoe said, *“Then I discovered that all these men had one thing in common. They were insurance salesmen.”*
  - e) And each one opened up his sales pitch the same way: *“Now, Mr. Briscoe, in the event that you might die – God forbid! - we have a small policy to help your family should that ever happen.”*
  - f) Stuart thought, “I sure don’t want to offend these nice gentlemen, but they were driving me nuts!
  - g) Finally, Briscoe said, *“I could take it no longer and I blurted out to one of them: “What do you mean **if** I should die? I **am** dying –right now! And I **will** be dead in a few years! What do you have to say about that?”*
  - h) He said, “The man didn’t stay long after that, and I didn’t buy any insurance from him that day.”
2. Comical? Yes. But it does reflect the reality that we do not like to talk about death and dying or heaven and hell very much.
  - a) Test out this fact: *Next time you are at an office party say, “You guys ever think about dying?”*
  - b) When you are on a date, ask the young lady, *“Darling, do you ever wonder what heaven is like?”*
  - c) Or if you are with a friend who’s unconverted and unchurched, be bold enough to say, *“Tom, do you fear going to hell?”*
  - d) ...just note their responses.
3. Why is it like that? I can understand not talking about hell, but why don’t we think much about heaven? *I believe we ignore the subject for three reasons...*
  - a) First: *We are a people who are increasingly secular – concerned mostly with the “stuff” of this world and this life.*
    - (1) We are headed the way of Europe and the Western World.

- (2) **R. C. Sproul** defines “secularism” as *“Ignoring the Eternal (Book: Lifeviews: Understand the Ideas that Shape Society Today; pp. 32-41)*

*“Secularism is the umbrella that shields the various competing philosophies beneath it. Secularism has the necessary common denominator to tie together humanism, pragmatism, relativism, naturalism, pluralism existentialism, and sever other isms.”*

*“The word secular has its origins and its roots in the Latin language and comes from the word saeculum which means “world.”*

*“The secular refers then to this world in this time. Its point of focus is here and now. The accent of the secular is on the present time rather than on eternity.”*

*“For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in light of this present time. The secularist either flatly denies or remains utterly skeptical about the eternal. He either says there is no eternal or if there is we can know nothing about it. What matters is now and only now.”*

*“The secularist can never offer ultimate answers to the human predicament because, for him, there are no ultimate answers - because there is no ultimate realm.”*

*“It is a philosophy of despair and it is right now competing for people’s minds in the United States.”*

- (3) **James Emery White** defines “secularism” this way (*Serious Time*; p. 34)

*“The English word secular derives from the Latin saeculum, which means “this present age.” The contemporary term secular is descriptive of that which is divorced from religious or spiritual sensibility – and looking back to the ancient Latin usage, it enthrones that which is of this world. Secularization is the process by which something becomes secular. And it is this cultural current which is raging through our world like a flash flood.”*

- (4) In his four wonderful books, **David F. Wells** chronicles how “secularism” (philosophy) and secularization” (social process) have reshaped the American Culture and church. (*God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*; p. 156)

*“What I am describing here, of course, is the way in which Western culture in general has been secularized. This is a two-sided process. What is external and sociological I have called secularization; what is internal and ideological I have called secularism. From the one perspective, what I am describing is the outlook and the values that arise in a society that is no longer taking its bearings from a transcendent order; from the other perspective, what I am describing is the track that modernization has taken within the human spirit in producing and authenticating contemporary values.”*

- (5) This has driven the concern for spiritual things and the discussion of the eternal out of the public sector and into the private world – *we think about heaven and hell but we’re not allowed to talk about them.*

- (6) Once people believed in Christ in order to go to heaven and not hell when they died – like **Martin Luther**. Now people receive Christ for health ‘n wealth, self-esteem and a better marriage – what T.V. preachers and modern pastors offer each Sunday.

(7) **David F. Wells** recognizes this in his book *Losing Our Virtue; Why the Church Must Recover It's Moral Vision* (pp. 21-22)

*“The Protestant Reformation, which was inadvertently launched by Luther in 1517, came to birth in a world vastly different from our own. It was different because it was still feudal in form, rather than modern, and this gave to life an entirely different texture. That was a religious age, whereas ours is not. That era was a supernatural age in a way that ours is not. It is, of course, true that secularization has not hounded the supernatural out of modern life entirely. What has happened is that it has restricted the supernatural to what is private and internal and has forced it out of the public square.”*

b) Second: *We seldom speak of heaven because we are too busy with the things of the earth. Materialism robs us of eternal concerns.*

(1) John the Apostle warned us of these things...

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

(2) We spend our time doing three things...

- Working hard to amass wealth
- Expending energy purchasing goods and services
- Spending time enjoying what we've bought

(3) **Fact:** It becomes more difficult with each passing year to inculcate spiritual principles and priorities in the life of evangelical church members because the people are simply not here...

(4) Look at our annual schedule: Summertime (May – August), Spring Break, Football season weekends, Christmastime, vacation, hunting season and traveling to relatives who live elsewhere, remove the saints from church a great deal.

(5) **I calculate** that 20 weeks out of the year the Church operates at reduced man power and interrupted schedule – that's 40% of the time.

(6) The average CCC member will be gone 1 weekend out of each month.

(7) This makes sermon series difficult, church work sporadic and eternal perspective almost impossible.

c) Third: *We seldom think or talk about heaven because we seldom read about it or hear the pastor preach on it!*

(1) How many sermons from this pulpit have you heard concerning heaven in 9 years under **Mike Ross**?

(2) How many solid books on heaven is Mike Ross able to lay his hands on?

(3) What section of Systematic Theology's seven sections is always the shortest and least developed? *Eschatology*

(4) And most Eschatology is devoted to arguments surrounding the interpretation of the *Book of Revelation*!

4. **Yet the fact remains:** *Every single one of us in this room, in our families and in the Church will spend a maximum of 100 years (+/-) in this world and then we will spend eternity – forever and ever without end –in heaven or hell, mankind's eternal homes!*

5. And so, I have decided to take the next 8 weeks, on Sunday evenings, to preach on “*Our Home in Heaven.*”

6. And we begin in a most appropriate manner:

a) And by looking at a classic passage of Scripture: *First Thessalonians 4:13-18*

b) **The text I use at every graveside moment of a funeral:**

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

7. A text to introduce our study that sets before us four grand realities about life after death and the second coming of Jesus Christ...

I. KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNAL THINGS GIVES US BOTH COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18)

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. Therefore encourage one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18)

1. **William Hendriksen** is correct when he states: “*Ignorance concerning spiritual realities is always bad for the believer. It leads to lack of comfort. That was particularly true in this case.*” (p. 109)

2. Paul gives us a good exhortation: “*...that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*” (v. 13)

a) Two extremes are to be avoided.

b) Stoicism – as if it was “spiritual” not to cry, grieve or mourn the death of loved ones.

c) Jesus wept over Lazarus. Christians grieve too when loved ones die.

d) **Harold L. Fickett, Jr.** (p. 74, 75).

*“There is a subtlety here that we must not miss. Paul does not tell believers that we will be free from sorrow when one of our Christian loved ones dies; he simply says that our sorrow will be much less than those who have no hope. We do have a message of comfort, consolation, and confidence to which we can cling tenaciously by faith. The ability to weep is one of the greatest blessings God has given to man. Through tears a person releases the tension pent up within him; through tears he expresses his love for the one departed; through tears he sympathizes with all others who are in sorrow. Jesus unashamedly wept at the grave of Lazarus, and the Jews comments, ‘Behold, how He loved him’” (John 11:36)*

- e) Death is a tragic, unnatural, violent and devastating event – *God did not create death. Death is the wages of sin. (Rom. 6:23)*
- f) But neither do we grieve like pagans – “*who have no hope*” in Christ.

3. **Jeffrey A. D. Weiner:** *1-2 Thessalonians: ECNT*; p. 303.

*The Christians in Thessalonica were grieving over fellow members of their church who died prior to Christ’s return (v. 13), fearing that these deceased believers would not be able to participate equally with living believers in the glorious events connected with the coming of the Lord. First, Paul responds to their grief by appealing to a creedal statement—an authoritative confession of the church concerning the resurrection of Jesus, which in turn guarantees the resurrection of deceased believers such that they will be alive and with Jesus at His return (v. 14). Second, the apostle appeals to the “Word of the Lord,” an authoritative saying of Jesus guaranteeing that deceased believers will in no way be at a disadvantage at Christ’s return compared to living believers but will participate equally with them in that eschatological event (vv. 15-17)*

4. Nothing is more disconcerting than a Christian who does not know how to face death -

- a) Throwing himself in sobs upon the casket
- b) Yelling out to the departed soul, “Oh \_\_\_\_\_, I love you! Come back! We miss you!”
- c) Mourning for months or years; seeking medical help in drugs or acting like nothing so tragic ever befell anyone else.
- d) Anger at those who will not stop their lives to grieve endlessly and needlessly with you.

5. **John R. W. Stott:** *The Message of Thessalonians: BST*; p. 95

- a) *The contrast between the gloomy despair of the heathen and the triumphant hope of the Christian mourner is nowhere more forcibly brought out than by their monumental inscriptions. The contrast of the tombs, for instance, in the Appian Way, above and below ground, has often been dwelt upon. On the one hand, there is the dreary wail of despair, the effect of which is only heightened by the pomp of outward splendor from which it issues. On the other hand, the exulting Psalm of hope, shining the more brightly in all ill-written, ill-spelt records amidst the darkness of subterranean caverns (i.e. Roman catacombs).*
- b) It remains true today: What is written on a tombstone tells us all we need to know about the faith of those who mourn.
- c) Hope...Despair; no in between!

6. It is normal for us to grieve, but we’ve got to do it with three things in mind...

- a) Our witness to others: If Christians can't overcome death then who can?

*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers.  
(Rom. 8:34-38)*

- b) We will see our loved ones again. They are not dead but alive in the afterlife. This world is not permanent.
- c) Our hope is in Christ – the resurrected Lord! Death died with Jesus!

*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, 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?”*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)*

7. Be careful not to mourn for dead loved ones rather than grieve for yourself over a loved one who died.
8. You and I, as Christians, can and must face death – our own and our loved ones – with the hope we have in Jesus...

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)*

## II. THE CHRISTIAN DEAD ARE ALIVE AND WITH JESUS CHRIST – RIGHT NOW (1 Thessalonians 4:14)

*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:14)*

1. Paul tells us that those who have died and left us here in this world are now with Jesus in what we call “heaven” – the intermediate state.
- a) **Robert Ross and Bowmar Virden (our deceased fathers)**

- b) Grandparents who died years ago (1971-1980)
  - c) Children who died, were stillborn or were miscarried
  - d) Friends and relatives who died
  - e) Members of our church who've passed away
  - f) Many are "*with the Lord*"
2. Paul tells us first of all that they are "*asleep*" in Christ...

- a) "...*those who have fallen asleep...*"
- b) An Old Testament term: "to sleep with the fathers"
- c) In the Bible the death of believers is often compared to sleep.

*The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.*  
(Matthew 27:52)

*After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. (John 11:11-14)*

- d) The Greek participle is important: *koimēthentas*
  - (1) An aorist, passive participle: literally *those who have been laid (put) to sleep*
  - (2) Not a present participle: *those who are falling asleep.*
  - (3) The present only occurs in v. 13 and 1 Corinthians 11:30.
  - (4) The aorist (past) refers to the point in time when they "fell asleep" (died).
  - (5) **F. F. Bruce** (p. 98).

*"The aorist koimēthentas relates to the moment of their falling asleep (dying), whereas the present koimōmenōn in v 13 relates to their consequent state of sleep (death)."*

- (6) "Sleep"? Not soul sleep or unconsciousness.
- e) Meaning: They have died to this life and now rest from their toils, labor and sorrows in this life.
- f) *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"* (Revelation 14:13)
- g) The word "*sleep*" is not only a euphemism for death but also is used to point to a future awakening – the resurrection.
- h) The body sleeps in the grave waiting the reawakening of the resurrection and reunion with the soul.

3. Paul also clearly tells us that our departed ones who died in Christ are presently with Him.

- a) "...*even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep*" (i.e., died)

b) Meaning: When Jesus returns again, He will bring with Him all those believers who died prior to the *parousia* (second coming).

c) **Leon Morris** (p. 190).

*“Paul is talking about the parousia. It is their share in the events of that great day that is in view. It is best to understand the words to mean that Jesus will bring the faithful departed with Him when He comes back. Their death does not mean that they will miss their share in the parousia.”*

d) If Jesus brings the faithful departed “with Him” when He returns, then they must be with Him **now!**

4. Notice the parallelism of ideas and words:

a) Those who are asleep in Christ will come “with Him” at the second coming.

b) We are all alive in Christ when He comes will be raptured up where we “will always be with the Lord” (v. 17)

c) A **great resurrection** leading to a **grand reunion**

d) Our shared glory and joy – *to be with the Lord!*

5. There are pictures here that allude to chapter 3 of Genesis: *There was a time when God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were “with the Lord.” Someday Jesus will return to restore our world to paradise. Then Christians will “always be with the Lord” – paradise regained!*

### III. JESUS IS COMING TO RAISE ALL BELIEVERS TO BOTH COMPLETE AND ETERNAL LIFE

(1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)*

1. Paul declares this “by the word of the Lord” – not a reference to another scripture passage, but...

a) some oral tradition known in the early church

b) some special revelation given to Paul and the Apostles

c) a fact rooted in God’s revelation, not man’s speculation

d) **Andrew Young** (p. 83).

*“Paul’s authority for saying this rests on the Lord’s own word (v. 15). He does not attempt to calm his readers with his own opinion or logic, and still less with wishful thinking. There can be no surer foundation for comfort than the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. His word puts an end to all doubt.”*

2. Unfortunately much human speculation about the tribulation, the rapture, the thousand year millennium, the rebuilding of the temple, the rise of new Israel, the war of Armageddon, etc. has robbed the saints of comfort and confidence. (Speculative foolishness of Dispensationalism)
3. Here Paul is so straightforward even a child can see the chronology of events...
  - a) *For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.* (1 Thessalonians 4:15)
    - (1) Those alive at the rapture will not be raised to a new life for 1,000 years while those already dead wait a millennium for their resurrected bodies.
    - (2) The living will not *precede* the dead to glory.
    - (3) The resurrection and glory of all believers come at Christ's return.
  - b) *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
    - (1) A chronology is given here
    - (2) Jesus begins to descend from heaven and when He reaches our atmosphere He shouts out a command
      - (i) *"Saints of the earth, Rise up!"*
      - (ii) *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.* (John 5:28-29)
      - (iii) All men rise from the grave for judgment
      - (iv) **William Hendriksen** (p. 116).  
*"Just as even here and now the voice of the Son of God is life-giving, causing those who are spiritually dead to be quickened so also when he comes back "all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out." The command, therefore, is definitely his own, proceeding from his lips. It is not a command issued to him, but an order given by him. Leaving heaven in his human nature, he utters his voice, and immediately the souls of the redeemed also leave, and are quickly reunited with their bodies, which, thus restored to life, arise gloriously."*
    - (3) One of the Archangels will utter a secondary command – probably in this way...
      - (i) First – he will order the saints to rise from their graves -
      - (ii) Second – he will call up the living believers (rapture)
      - (iii) Third – he will summon the unbelievers to rise and stand for judgment
      - (iv) Is this archangel **Michael**? Probably, but we are not certain.
      - (v) **Abraham Kuyper** (Hendriksen, p. 116).

*“This question cannot be answered, because Scripture says nothing about it. It is possible that Michael is the archangel, that is, the only archangel, but it is also possible that he is one of the archangels (one of the seven angels that stand before God’s throne), as in Daniel 10:13 he is called one of the chief princes, so that Gabriel as well as Michael might be an archangel.”*

(vi) The Apocryphal *Enoch 20:1-9*, identifies these seven archangels as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Sarafael and Remiel (Jeramiel)

(4) Then the Archangel blows the Trumpet of God...

(i) to announce the arrival of King Jesus

(ii) to call all creation to the Great White Throne Judgment

(iii) **Leon Morris** (p. 144).

*“Trumpets are often mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with times of festivity and triumph. They were a frequent accompaniment of great religious occasions. Paul speaks of the trumpet elsewhere as associated with the Parousia. It fits in as part of the pageantry, stressing the majesty of the Lord, and the greatness of the day.”*

(5) Then the graves will open, the bodies of the dead saints will reassemble from dust, and will be taken up toward Jesus – heading into the heavens to meet the Lord and to be reunited with their souls!

c) *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.* (1

Thessalonians 4:17)

(1) Then the Christians who are alive shall be *raptured* – “caught up,” following those who died into the presence of Christ.

(2) **The order is clear:** those who die first, rise first, but all rise on the same day!

(3) The “glorious day of the Lord” is just that; One day, not divided by 1,000 years, but a resurrection, in order, on the day Jesus returns.

4. That fact points to Paul’s fourth and final truth about our resurrection.

#### IV. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST BEGINS THE FINAL STATE OF ETERNITY FOR ALL (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

*Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.* (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

1. Look carefully at what Paul states in verse 17...

2. The “rapture” ends this world and begins the world to come.

a) “Rapture” comes from the Latin *rapere*: to snatch away, to grab up, to catch up

- b) The Latin equivalent of the Greek *haparzein* – to grab something suddenly or even violently; to wrest something away from another.
  - c) Jesus wrestles us out of the jaws of death, the clutches of Satan, the bondage of a sinful world.
  - d) Like a knight on his white horse (Rev. 19:11) who rescues his damsel in distress – *The Bride of Christ...The Church!*
3. Jesus is suspended between heaven and earth: “*in the clouds...in the air*”
- a) Just as He promised He would!  
*Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64)*
  - b) The verb here is that used of meeting an official outside the city gate and accompanying Him into the city with honor.
  - c) **F. F. Bruce** (pp. 102-103).  
*“When a dignitary paid an official visit (parousia) to a city in Hellenistic times, that action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the apantēsis (meeting).”*  
*“These analogies (especially in association with the term parousia) suggest the possibility that the Lord is pictured here as escorted on the remainder of his journey to earth by his people – both those newly raised from the dead and those who have remained alive.”*
  - d) We meet Christ in the air; midway between heaven and earth; outside the City of Man.
  - e) We escort Jesus back to earth – our home, His dominion, and the place where He will build the New City of God!
4. As the saints – both dead and alive – rise up to meet the Lord in the clouds they are transformed...
- a) *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.*  
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)
  - b) The braces of the cripple fall off, the eyes of the blind open up, the flesh of the cancerous one is restored, the mind of the mentally ill is made clear, all sickness, sorrow and shame is shed from the rising saints like old clothes...
  - c) Replaced with glorified bodies like that of Jesus, and white robes like the citizens of heaven!
5. New life, in a New State, in a New World begins:
- a) a great judgment for all..  
*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:31-32)*  
*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before*

*the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-14)*

- b) The City of God – the New Jerusalem – comes down from heaven (above) to transform our world...

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2)*

- c) Then we begin our life with God: “we will always be with the Lord...”

(1) Paradise has been regained. Jesus won it back for us in His great warfare for God and His Church.

(2) *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. 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.” (Revelation 21:3-4)*

6. God’s universe will be restored to its glorious, sinless state – all because of Jesus Christ...

**CONCLUSION:** What are we to do with all this information about resurrection, heaven and glory?

1. Well, first, we are to learn more. This we will do over these next 7 weeks...
2. Next, we are to prepare ourselves for heaven; Repentance from sin and Faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Third, we are to “*comfort one another with these words.*” (v. 18)

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1-3)*

*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)*

4. Finally, we are to **expect** and **look forward to** a “grand reunion” of those who’ve died and gone before us into Heaven:
  - a) Loved ones close to us: **Parents, grandparents, ancestors we heard of but never knew, etc.**

- b) Famous people in our own times: **Billy Graham, John Stott, Ronald Reagan, war heroes, etc.**
- c) The great saints of history: **Martyrs, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, C. H. Spurgeon, etc.**
- d) The legendary people of the Bible: **Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul, etc.**
- e) And, most of all, God Himself: **Father, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit**

5. *Heaven will be one huge, joyful and fun-filled family reunion.*

*I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 8:11-12)*

6. There will be loved ones, friends and people we admired who do **not** make it to the New Heaven and New Earth, because they had not trusted in Christ and followed Him.

a) *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)*

b) Will this sadden us? Perhaps, for a few moments

i. *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. (Rev. 21:4)*

ii. *"every tear from their eyes" = perhaps, tears of feeling this sense of loss.*

c) **But** in our sinless condition we will be able to both understand why these friends and loved ones were not elect, and we will *actually agree* with God and give Him glory for judging them!

d) *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

*You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom. 9:14-24)*

e) *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*

“Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*  
(Romans 11:34-36)

- f) **Our love for Christ will exceed immeasurably our love for family and friends; and our loyalty to Christ will trump any and every emotion we feel as human beings.**

7. The joy of the *Grand Reunion* will last forever. And here is how **Randy Alcorn** describes it, in his book *Heaven* (pp. 345-346).

*In Heaven, will we spend time with people whose lives are recorded in Scripture and church history? No doubt. Jesus told us we'll sit at the dinner table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:11). If we sit with them, we should expect to sit with others. Who will we talk with in Heaven? I'd like to ask Mary to tell stories about Jesus as a child. I'd enjoy talking with Simeon, Anna, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist. I want to hear Noah's accounts of life on the ark. I'm eager to listen to Moses tell about his times with God on the mountain. I'd like to ask Elijah about being taken away in a chariot and Enoch (and Enoch's wife) about his being caught up by God. I want to talk with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. I'll ask people to fill in the blanks of the great stories in Scripture and church history. I want to hear a few million new stories. One at a time, of course, and spread out over thousands of years. I imagine we'll relish these great stories, ask questions, laugh together, and shake our heads in amazement. We'll each have our own stories to tell also—and the memories and skills to tell them well. Right now, today, we are living the lives from which such stories will be drawn. We'll have new adventures on the New Earth from which new stories will emerge, but I suspect the old stories from this life will always interest us too. I look forward to reconnecting with many old friends as well as my mom and dad. I look forward to thanking C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and A. W. Tozer for how their writings changed me. I anticipate meeting William Carey, Hudson and Maria Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Jim Elliot, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody, Harriet Beecher Stowe, some of the Amistad slaves, and a host of others. Who's on your list?*

8. Jesus promised us this *Grand Reunion*. He said “I will see you again.” And if we see the resurrected Christ, then we'll see all who've been resurrected as well!

*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* (John 14:1-3)

*Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.* (John 16:20-22)

9. We have lots of people to look forward to seeing in Heaven. Who's on your list?