

Revelation 21:1-8 “A Needed Reminder of What Is Coming”—part one**¹

Main Idea: In Revelation 21:1-8 the Lord provides us with the needed reminder of what is coming. He identifies two groups of people and two eternal experiences.

- I. What’s coming for some—a new heaven and new earth (1-7).
 - A. John saw a new heaven and earth (1).
 - B. John saw the new Jerusalem (2).
 - C. John heard a voice from the throne (3-4).
 1. God's dwelling is with men.
 2. God will live with His people.
 3. They will be His people, and He will be their God.
 4. He will wipe away all of their tears.
 5. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.
 6. The old order has passed away.
 - D. John heard the person seated on the throne (5-8).
 1. He announced His intent (5).
 2. He revealed His identity (6a).
 3. He declared a promise (6b-7).
 - II. What’s coming for everyone else—a fiery lake (8).
 - A. The Lord tells us who will be there.
 - B. The Lord tells us what they will experience.
- Application: We need constant reminders of what is coming.
1. Am I ready?
 2. Am I living like it?
 3. Am I engaging in the ministry of reminding?

I’m a note taker. If you’ve ever seen my desk you know I have notes all over the place. I need reminders of what is coming, lest I forget.

In today’s message I want to give you a reminder slip. Actually, the Lord gave it to us in the final book of the Bible. I’ve entitled this sermon, “*A Needed Reminder of What Is Coming.*”

If you have hope for the future, which we who know Christ do, you can endure much pain and injustice in the present. Several years ago I listened to Tim Keller’s sermon on Revelation 21 where he tells a couple of stories that illustrate the point.

Many years ago two men were thrown into a horrible prison for ten years. On the way into the prison the first man frantically looked for his wife and son but was told, “They are dead. You’ll never see them again.” But the other man’s wife and son were there and said to him through the bars, “We’ll be waiting for you when you get out.” In the harsh conditions of prison life, the first man lasted about two years and then just gave up, dying as a forgotten man. But the second man persevered through the hardship, knowing he would see his loved ones again, which he did.

When you have hope for the future, you can endure much pain in the present.

Keller’s second story is about two men who were offered jobs in a factory that made widgets. The first man was told, “The work is tedious, but if you do it well you’ll receive \$20,000 at the end of the year.” The man agreed, and began to work. When the second man was offered a job he was told, “The work is tedious, but if you do it well you will receive \$20 million at the end of the year.” He too agreed, and began to make widgets. The first man lasted a couple of months, but the monotony frustrated him, and

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages in “Promises” series on 1/27/13 and 7/21/19.

finally he said, “It’s not worth it,” and quit. The second man, however, doing the same boring work, whistled and worked away with joy in his heart.

Both men endured the same frustrating circumstances. To the first, it was pure misery. To the second, there was joy in the misery. What made the difference? *Hope*. Knowing what’s coming made the difference.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness,” the present suffering, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” the future hope.

You know what I’m about to tell you. But you need the reminder, and so do I. In Revelation 21:1-8 the Lord provides us with a needed reminder of what is coming. He identifies two distinct groups of people and two distinct eternal experiences.

This is a reminder for He’s told us before. In the Old Testament prophecy of Daniel 12:2-3, we’re told, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

Then in John’s gospel we read (John 3:36), “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

It’s true. Two distinct groups. Two distinct eternal experiences. Everyone who lives will one day leave this life, either by death or Christ’s return, and everyone who leaves this life will live somewhere forever.

Paul was right when he said, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men (1 Cor 15:19).” If this life is it, then there is no hope for the Christian, any more than the non-Christian. We might as well, “Eat, drink, and be merry.”

But there is a resurrection. And there is a life to come.

I’m quite sure that we would live differently in this life if that truth really got a hold of our souls. I want it to sink in, and sink in deeply. We’re living in a world that tells us this life is all there is, and it’s easy for us as Christians to buy into that lie.

It shows up in the way we spend our time and our money—after just one glimpse of heaven, we’ll see that we really didn’t need all that stuff we thought we just had to have. It shows up in how we treat people who wrong us—I can tell you for sure we would never tell anyone to “go to hell” if we really knew what that place was like.

My friends, there is a life to come, and God wants us to think about it continually. Which is why He posted a reminder for us in Revelation 21.

I. What’s coming for some—a new heaven and new earth (1-7).

Verse 1, “Then I saw.” John the apostle is speaking, and in this book he has recorded a series of visions the Lord allowed him to see pertaining to future events.

Chapter one—John gives an introduction to the main character: this is the “revelation of *Jesus Christ* (1:1).”

Chapters two & three—we see seven letters to seven churches from Jesus.

Chapters four & five—John records a vision of the throne in heaven.

Chapters six through nineteen—John sees and pens the mind-boggling events of judgment that will occur during the future seven year tribulation period.

Chapter twenty—John tells us about the thousand year Millennial kingdom that’s coming after the tribulation, followed by the great white throne judgment, and a horrid description of the lake of fire.

Then we come to the final two chapters of the Bible, where we see a parallel with the first two chapters of the Bible. In Genesis 1-2, God created the heavens and the earth, a paradise, a perfect universe. What do we see in Revelation 21-22? We see that God is going to create a *new* heaven and earth, a perfect paradise that will never end. The first two chapters and the last two chapters are like bookends to the Bible. The rest of the Bible is in essence the story of what God did in His grace to take His universe from Paradise Lost to Paradise Restored.

In Revelation 21, John *saw* something in verse 1, then *saw* something else in verse 2, then *heard* a voice in verses 3-4, and then *heard* another voice in verses 5-8.

A. John saw a new heaven and earth (1). “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” New, as in totally unlike the old? I don’t think so, as we’ll see. More like, new as in totally renewed. Again, the paradise at God’s first creating work gives us a foretaste of this new creating work.

And why will there be a new heaven and new earth? John says, “...for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” What was wrong with the first heaven and earth? Sin. Lucifer’s sin tarnished heaven, and man’s sin tarnished earth. And the wages of sin is ... death.

So the universe as we know it will pass away, says John. Peter elaborates on this “passing away” in 2 Peter 3:10-13, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will **disappear** with a roar; the elements will be **destroyed** by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be **laid bare**. Since everything will be **destroyed** in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

It’s impossible for us as finite beings, locked as we are into “time and space” categories, to explain how this passing away will occur. Just “where” will we be when the old is being destroyed and the new is arriving? John’s point isn’t to satisfy our curiosity here, but to assure us it’s coming. And to urge us to be ready.

What struck John about the new heaven and earth in verse 1? There’s no sea there. In Bible times the sea was a frightening place, representing turmoil and danger. There will be none of that in the place that John saw, the new heaven and new earth.

B. John saw the new Jerusalem (2). Notice verse 2, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

In apocalyptic literature, which John uses in the book of Revelation, images represent supernatural scenes that human language is incapable of fully describing. You’ll see repeated use of the terms “like” and “as.” Here John likens the new heaven and earth to a beautiful bride. It’s a mixed metaphor, a city (which depicts community) that looks like a bride (which depicts intimacy). As the *NIV Study Bible* suggests, “The ‘Holy City’ combines elements of Jerusalem, the temple and the Garden of Eden.”

John says he saw this city coming down out of heaven. In verse 9, he indicates that the bride, the wife of the lamb, will be in that city. In verse 10 he mentions the Holy City again, emphasizing that it will come down from heaven to the new earth.

We often talk about heaven as if it is the Christian's final destination. But it's not. Granted, Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is in heaven, but there's more in store than just heaven for the believer.²

Randy Alcorn explains, "Often we think of Heaven as our going up into an angelic realm to live with God in his place. But in fact, the Bible says the ultimate Heaven, will be God coming down from His place to live with us in our place—the New Earth. That's the place He's making for us."³

Perhaps that's why God's Word uses so many "earthly" images to depict what's coming. Jesus said He's building a *house* with many rooms. In Hebrews 11:9, Abraham is looking forward to a *city* with foundations whose architect and builder is God. In Hebrews 11:16, the patriarchs are longing for a better *country*—a *heavenly one*, and that God is preparing a *city* for them. As F. F. Bruce explains, "There is, of course, no difference between the heavenly country and the city of God."⁴

The point is, we're not going to be floating around on clouds strumming harps. We're longing for a country, a *heavenly* country. What will it be like? Listen to J. I. Packer in his book, *Your Father Loves You*:

We know very little about heaven, but I once heard a theologian describe it as "an unknown region with a well-known inhabitant," and there is not a better way to think of it than that. Richard Baxter expresses the thought in these lines:

*My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim,
But it's enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with him.*

To those who have learned to love and trust Jesus, the prospect of meeting him face to face and being with him forever is the hope that keeps us going, no matter what life may throw at us."⁵

Brothers and sisters, while we don't know all the details (and couldn't fathom them if we had them), we do know that the place that our soul heads when we die, *heaven*, will not be our final home. Look at the post-it note. It reminds us that we'll be coming down out of heaven with our Savior to place in a new, sin-free earth.

C. John heard a voice from the throne (3-4). "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

Who's speaking? John doesn't identify the source. What impressed him, at least initially, was the volume. It's a "loud" voice. The KJV says it was a "great" voice and it came "out of heaven."

² Some of the following quotes were taken from an earlier message preached at WBC on Hebrews 11:13-22, "Looking for a Better Country."

³ Randy Alcorn, http://epm.org/media-files/pdf/Heaven_Sermon01.pdf

⁴ Quote taken from Philip Hughes' footnote, p. 480.

⁵ James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.

Apparently it's an angel, and he makes an astounding declaration that the long-awaited climax of redemptive history has come! He tells John (and us) that six things are associated with the coming of the new heavens and earth.

1. *God's dwelling is with men.* If you'll recall, Adam had a taste of that when, in the garden, in the cool of the day, God came and walked with Him. But in the coming paradise God will actually *live* with man.

The KJV says the "tabernacle of God is with men." The tabernacle was the tent that Moses constructed as a temporary dwelling place for the Lord. Later the temple was built, and the glory of God filled that temple. But because of man's sinfulness, in time, His glory departed. God left sinful man. Now He is back. Doing what?

2. *God will live with His people.* "He will live with them," says the voice. Amazing. The transcendent God will actually live with redeemed human beings.

3. *They will be His people, and He will be their God.* This is the goal of God's plan. Right now He is forming a people for Himself, rescuing sinners and making them fit for the day when He lives with them. That's why He sent His Son into the world, and why Jesus died on the cross as a sin offering. But Jesus did something else. He defeated death and left the tomb with a glorified body. He did that for us too. We could never survive in the presence of the holy and glorious God in our current state. We need a suitable body, a *glorified* body if we're going to live with God.

My friend, if you don't know Jesus, you wouldn't want for God to dwell with you. His presence would destroy you, if you weren't prepared for it. And only Jesus can do that.

4. *He will wipe away all of their tears.* That's what verse 4 says. What does that imply? That there were tears that needed to be wiped away, right? They were there, but then He removed them. Why were they there? Because this life is hard, isn't it? There's pain, there's loss, theirs persecution, and there are tears.

But could it be there will be some tears in heaven, some remorse over what our lives could have been? 1 Corinthians 3:15 speaks of some in Christ who will be saved, but "only as one escaping through the flames," due to wasted kingdom opportunities. I think there will be regret, and tears. And then...God Himself will wipe those tears away too, just like He did our sin. And then...

5. *There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.* It's hard to fathom such a world, isn't it? We spend so much time attempting to postpone death, and soften the effects of our mourning, crying, and pain. But the day that God begins to tabernacle with His saved people on a new earth, that will all be gone.

Finally, the voice puts it in ultimate terms...

6. *The old order has passed away.* The KJV says, "The former things are passed away." The things that have kept us from seeing and loving and living fully for our God will be gone. No sin. No wicked flesh. No devil. No temptations. It will all be gone.

So if the old order is going to pass away, we need to guard our hearts from getting too attached to it now, right?

Then, after hearing this loud voice, John heard another voice.

D. John heard the person seated on the throne (5-8). Notice verse 5, "He who was seated on the throne said." Who's sitting on the throne? He'll identify Himself momentarily. But first...

1. *He announced His intent (5)*. “I am making everything new!” He didn’t say, “I will make all new things, but rather, I will make all things new.”⁶ “Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

What’s the intent of this Royal Being? To make everything new. Now that’s a bold claim, and to make such a claim one must have the credentials and clout. And in this case the person on this throne has both. Who’s speaking here?

2. *He revealed His identity (6a)*. He speaks at the beginning of verse 6, “He said to me: ‘It is done.’” John heard those words before, didn’t He? Standing by the cross. “It is finished (John 19:30).”

Then He says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” John heard those words at the beginning of His vision in 1:8. This is the Lord God Himself speaking. He’ll hear them again at the end of the vision in 22:13, and He’ll hear the name of the speaker in 22:16, “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and Morning Star.”

This is Jesus speaking, the Glorified Savior Himself. And He gives John a promise.

3. *He declared a promise (6b-7)*. It starts at the end of verse 6 and continues in verse 7, “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

First, He offers something to the person who is thirsty. “I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” That’s what Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4:13-14, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

This is an evangelistic offer, and until the old order passes, His offer remains. My non-Christian friend, do you hear what Jesus is saying? He’s offering you living water, eternal life. Will you receive it?

But He also gives a promise to the *one who overcomes*, to the believer who faces challenges yet remains faithful in this life. This is the ultimate incentive for living. What’s Jesus’ offer to this person? He will *inherit all this*, and *I will be his God and he will be my son*.

In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan shares a conversation between two pilgrims who are on their way to the celestial city, which represents heaven. One of the two pilgrims says to the other, “When do you find yourself in the most wholesome and most vigorous spiritual state?” to which the other pilgrim says, “When I think of the place to which I am going.”

When heaven is on our mind, it changes the way we live now. It gives us hope. Unfortunately, we’re often like the cynical Mark Twain, who when told about heaven remarked flippantly, “You take heaven, I’d rather go to Bermuda.”⁷

Friends, we need this reminder. And we need to *remember* this reminder.

I’ll say it again. If you want an idea of what’s coming, think of what we lost in the Garden of Eden. The paradise lost in Eden foreshadows the paradise restored in the coming New Earth. I love Randy Alcorn’s answer to the question, “What *won’t* be in Heaven?” He writes:

⁶ Observation by Phillip Ryken in his sermon on Revelation 21 preached at The Gospel Coalition.

⁷ The Bunyan and Twain quotes come from John MacArthur’s sermon on Revelation 21. www.gty.org.

No death, no suffering. No funeral homes, abortion clinics, or psychiatric wards. No rape, missing children, or drug rehabilitation centers. No bigotry, no muggings or killings. No worry or depression or economic downturns. No wars, no unemployment. No anguish over failure and miscommunication. No con men. No locks. No death. No mourning. No pain. No boredom.

No arthritis, no handicaps, no cancer, no taxes, no bills, no computer crashes, no weeds, no bombs, no drunkenness, no traffic jams and accidents, no septic-tank backups. No mental illness. No unwanted e-mails.

Close friendships but no cliques, laughter but no put-downs. Intimacy, but no temptation to immorality. No hidden agendas, no backroom deals, no betrayals.

Imagine mealtimes full of stories, laughter, and joy, without fear of insensitivity, inappropriate behavior, anger, gossip, lust, jealousy, hurt feelings, or anything that eclipses joy. That will be Heaven.⁸

This is what the life to come will be like, only better, for eye has not seen, nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). This is where we are heading, if we're in Christ. We have the promise of Jesus Himself on it.

But we have another promise from Jesus, too, one not so pleasant to consider, but equally true. There are two groups of people in Revelation 21, and two eternal experiences. Some will spend the life to come in a new heaven and earth. That's one group. Here's the other.

II. What's coming for everyone else—a fiery lake (8).

The Lord continues to speak in verse 8, “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Notice that there are but two destinations in eternity. A person will either be in the new heaven and earth, or the lake of fire. We learn two things about the latter group.

A. The Lord tells us who will be there. Jesus mentions eight types of people. First, the *cowardly*. The Greek word *deilois* means “fearful, afraid, timid.” Jesus used the word in Mark 4:40, “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”

Next, the *unbelieving*. The Greek *apistois* means “to lack in trust, to doubt.” It signifies an unbeliever, a non-Christian, someone who does not believe the Gospel. That's what keeps a person out of heaven, *unbelief*. They refuse to believe in the only Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

And their fearful unbelief which is internal goes public. They become *vile*. The word (from *bdelyssomai*) means “to detest, to consider abhorrent.” The vile are those who do things in their lives that God detests. Jesus gives some examples...

The murderers are in this group, those who take life. And so are the *sexually immoral*, those who take sex outside of marriage. And *those who practice magic arts*, from the Greek *pharmakois* (from *pharmikon*, a drug), which means a poisoner, a sorcerer, a magician. Those who redefine spirituality.

The idolaters are in Jesus' list, too, those who worship false gods, or even those who try to worship the true God in forbidden ways, through man-made idols.

⁸ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven: Biblical Answers to Common Questions*, pp. 35-6.

And the last group, Jesus says, are the *liars*. He emphasizes *all* liars, and uses a word (*pseudēs*) that means “to be false and deceptive.”

What strikes you about this list of those who will *not* be in the new heaven and earth? It’s pretty comprehensive, isn’t it? It includes what we call *big* sins and *little* sins. And it describes every one of us, doesn’t it? Have you ever told a lie, or lusted for sex, or murdered someone in your heart? *Guilty*, says Jesus in the sermon on the mount. A lawbreaker. Condemned to die.

Every person that will enjoy the new earth deserves to be in this number. Why aren’t they? Because they took Jesus’ offer and drank the water of life. But these refused. They would not believe. Consequently...

B. The Lord tells us what they will experience. Notice again the end of verse 8, “Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

John just heard about that place back in 20:14-15, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Friends, everyone will live forever somewhere. Either in the new heaven and earth. Or in a fiery lake where people will die but not cease to exist forever and ever.

In another very helpful book called *Safely Home*, Randy Alcorn tells the story of the persecuted church in China. He does a wonderful job of addressing critical subjects like why does God allow His people to suffer under wicked dictators like Mao. The book continually reminds us of the biblical truth that there is more to life than this world. As he puts it, “Death is not a wall; it is a doorway. We live on one side of death. There is another side.”⁹

I’ve shared with you what Alcorn has to say about heaven. The following description by Randy Alcorn is the best word picture of hell, outside of the Bible, that I’ve ever read. Alcorn writes from the perspective of Mao Zedung himself. Though lengthy, listen to Mao as he speaks from his eternal home:

Where is my palace? Where are my servants? Does no one know who I am?

The vast, cold darkness cut into his face. It felt like intense frostbite, burning his skin.

I was the most powerful man in Zhongguo. I created the People’s Republic. I was the revered father of my country. They worshiped me. I was god! He waited, listening to the silence. Cannot anyone hear me?

His voice disappeared into the great dark void. It did not echo, for there was nothing for it to echo off. It was immediately absorbed into infinite nothingness. His words went no farther than his blistered lips.

A parade of untold millions marched inside his mind’s eye. His sentence was to relive the suffering of each of his victims. He had been here over twenty-five years. Every minute of those years he had relived the sufferings he inflicted on others. Every torture his regime inflicted he now received, one after the next after the next. Eventually, perhaps, they would start over, so the millions he had already endured were but the first installment. The pain was unbearable, yet he had no choice but to bear it. There was no escape into unconsciousness—no drug to take, no sleeping pill, no alcohol. That which he had laid upon others was now laid upon him—endlessly, relentlessly.

⁹ Randy Alcorn, *Safely Home*, p. 327.

He longed to pluck out his eyes, to keep from seeing what he saw, to puncture his eardrums to keep from hearing the wailing misery, to pull out his tongue to keep from tasting the awfulness he had legislated. But he had no ability to destroy himself. He had no control now over his destiny, no power over himself or others. There was no one he could command to fix the situation, no one to prepare him an eight-course meal to assuage the eternal hunger, no one to serve him mao-tai. No one with whom to plot and scheme, no one to do his work, no one to punish for their errors. No one to salute him, cower at his voice, or bow heads in his presence.

Where is everyone?

Misery loves company, and he had long sought the consolation of others. But all others were still on earth, secure in heaven, or confined to their own private hells at distances immeasurable.

The aloneness was stifling. He could hear nothing but his victims' cries, feeling nothing but their pain, see nothing but their blood, taste nothing but their vomit, sense nothing but their torture. He had only himself. He could not enjoy his own company, for he saw himself as he really was. It was an ugly sight, revolting beyond comprehension.

He felt a burning. A fury welled up inside him. Anger and bitterness, unfocused hostility, frustration leading him to lash out. But there was no one to lash out at. No incompetent aid, no dissident, no Christian pastor, no helpless peasant. No one to beat or shoot or hang or starve. No one to cower in fear at the power of the great chairman, architect of the Republic. No one to shine his shoes or rub lotion upon his burning feet...

He had come to death entirely unprepared—and now it was too late to prepare. If the torture was not enough, a sickening feeling of foreboding had gripped him from his first moments here. He had hoped it would subside, that he would get used to it. He hadn't. It only got worse.

He could see now through all his rationalizations. His arguments against belief in a Creator had never been intellectual ones, as he had claimed. By rejecting a Creator he thought he could rid himself of a Judge. But it had not worked. His atheism had been the opiate of his soul and the executioner of uncalculated millions. But now his comforting atheism could no longer exist, even for a fleeting moment, for he had been forever stripped of the power to deny reality.

He had lived his short todays as if there were no long tomorrow. He had believed the lie that all were accountable to him and he was accountable to none. He had believed the lie that death would slip him into eternal unconsciousness. He knew now—how well he knew—the curse of always being awake, ever alert, unable to allay his suffering with a moment's sleep or distraction...

He had said, "I want there to be no God; I want nothing to do with him." His atheist's prayer had been answered. The everywhere-present God had chosen to withdraw his presence from this single place, turning it into a cosmic desert. This was a ghetto of massive proportions, yet so small it could slip through a single crack in the tiles of heaven. It was located in some distant and empty place, never to be feared or even stumbled upon by the citizens of Charis. His life, with all his supposed accomplishments, was but a puff of smoke, dissipating into nothingness...

Thirst without water to quench it. Hunger without food to satisfy it. Loneliness without company to alleviate it. There was no God here. He'd gotten his wish. On earth he'd managed to reject God while still enjoying his blessings and provisions. But it was excruciatingly clear now that God was the author of good. Therefore the absence of God meant the absence of good. He could not have it both ways, not here. No God, no good. Forever."¹⁰

Application: We need constant reminders of what is coming.

And we need them often. That's what Richard Baxter learned. Listen to what John Piper shared about Baxter in a sermon he preached on heaven.¹¹

Richard Baxter was a very effective pastor in England in the 1600s. His whole adult life was spent battling one sickness after the other. He was harassed by a constant cough, frequent nosebleeds, migraine headaches, digestive ailments, kidney stones, and gallstones... Bodily suffering was with him to the end, and he once said that from the age of 21 he was "seldom an hour free from pain."

One of the effects of this suffering was to make him intensely conscious of how temporary his life is and how inevitable death is. Once, when he was 35, he was bed-bound by one of his diseases and thought he would probably not recover. He began to meditate on the joys of heaven and the age to come in preparation for leaving this world. He focused especially on "the hope of glory" and began to write his thoughts.

To his surprise he recovered and his thoughts became a book entitled *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. He took up the practice of meditating on heaven a half hour each day because of the powerful impact it had on his life. He commended the same thing to his readers. He said, "If you would have light and heat, why are you not more in the sunshine? For want of this recourse to heaven, your soul is as a lamp not lighted, and your duty as a sacrifice without fire. Fetch one coal daily from this altar, and see if your offering will not burn . . . Keep close to this reviving fire, and see if your affections will not be warm."¹²

Friends, we've been reminded today of what's coming, so let's finish by asking ourselves three questions.

1. *Am I ready?*
2. *Am I living like it?*
3. *Am I engaging in the ministry of reminding?*

Next time (July 12, the Lord willing): "A Needed Reminder of What Is Coming"—part two, Revelation 21:9-27

¹⁰ Randy Alcorn, *Safely Home*, pp. 327-30.

¹¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/ behold-i-make-all-things-new>

¹² This material on Baxter was taken from Timothy Beougher and J.I. Packer, "Go Fetch Baxter," in *Christianity Today*, vol. 35, no. 15, December 16, 1991, pp. 26-27