

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

LutheranRenewal

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Is

Heaven

What You

Think it Is?



by Paul Anderson

I have a problem. I am too much in this world and not enough in the next. I seldom think about heaven. It concerns me because Paul said that *"all who have longed for his appearing"* will receive a special crown. I love competing when I know there's something out there to go for. And so did Paul. He spoke of pressing *"on toward the goal to win the prize."* We are motivated by prizes. And this baffles me. The incentives that God holds out in the whole package of heaven have not sufficiently caught my attention. This is the qualifying run, the dress rehearsal. Eighty years compared to eternity is not much. I would like to make heaven less remote.

After two years of seminary, I went overseas to work in a mission and study. Then I traveled through Europe. When I arrived in London, I planned to go to one of the most famous museums in the world. But the thought didn't appeal to me at all. I had seen enough museums. I had been away for over a year, so I booked my flight and headed for California. When I went through customs, the officer stamped my passport and said, "Welcome home." I got choked up. I was home. I wish I experienced that kind of homesickness for heaven. Paul said, *"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far"* (Phil. 1:23).

I am writing about "there" to help us and our churches with "here." When we can hope, we can cope. Grab onto the future, and suddenly the present is bearable or even enjoyable. Anticipate a fun evening and it brightens the day. A weekend trip can flavor the whole week. Now here's the trick: apply this thinking to our eternal destiny. And when you change your outlook of heaven as I did, it might catch your attention in a new way as it caught mine. The idea of heaven coming to earth has changed the whole picture.

Heaven is a happy place. I say this because some need to be convinced. Tell a teenager that heaven is like a wonderful worship service, only extended for decades, and they might say, "Great, and do I get to play a harp?" Culture's caricature has overtaken us. Taking walks on streets of gold hardly grabs them. I'll offer seven reasons from the end of the Book why heaven will be a blast to end all blasts:



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1. Re-creation. John writes, *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away”* (Rev. 21:1). God liked what He created, and He doesn’t plan to trash it. Paul writes that *“the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time”* (Rom. 8:21,22). The earth is getting ready to be born again, and God is not going to abandon this new child. Like the Christmas hymn says, *“He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.”* Re-creation is about making all things new (vs. 6), not about making new things, and the earth will experience a significant upgrade. Earth is the ultimate human destiny, not a far-off place.

We have had some wrong ideas about heaven. In the first place, we have over-spiritualized heaven, making it remote and less appealing. It is the work of demons to portray the physical realm as unspiritual (I Tim. 4:3,4). One commentary said, “He (John) is concerned for spiritual states, not physical realities.” Wrong. We are Biblical Christians, not eastern mystics. We say in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body,” and in heaven we will have physical bodies. We are not spirits in heaven, floating around in space. As Randy Alcorn, author of the excellent book called *Heaven*, says, “The earth matters, our bodies matter, animals and trees matter, matter matters” (p. 85). Make heaven too otherworldly and it loses its fascination. I remember reading with some disappointment about the golden streets and the glitter of jewelry. It didn’t excite me. We will do much more in heaven than float on clouds, take walks, and sing. We will eat—with God the cook (Isaiah 25:6). And we will not have green jello with shredded carrots! We may even enjoy the same pets we had on earth, because heaven (the new earth) will include many animals (Isaiah 11:6-9). (But that might not include cats. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a cat to enter the kingdom of heaven.” They have a hard time repenting—but they want you to repent!)

In addition to over-spiritualizing, we have adopted an escapist outlook. We have been given the impression that the earth is a bad place, so we hope that Jesus whisks us out of here before the devil creams us. Heaven becomes our great escape—the land beyond the sun. Truth is, heaven’s coming to us! God is not finished with the earth.

2. Romance. *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband... One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”* (Rev. 21:2, 9). We have celebrated two joyous weddings in our family last summer and this summer. Romance is in the air. The romance of the ages started with a walk and ends with a wedding. When talking about romance, you wouldn’t expect to see the word “city.” Cities are places of crime, concrete, and crowds. Anything goes in cities, even in Jerusalem. But not the new and improved Jerusalem. God takes the stuff that we know about and makes it new and beautiful. We know how exciting being in love can be, and heaven, the invention of a passionate God, was created for lovers. Sex is a human analogy to the intensity of that love. No one will complain of being bored. Guaranteed!

3. Relationship. *“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’”* (Rev. 21:3). I love prepositions. They are humble and unassuming. They don’t draw attention to themselves but to their object. The word “with” is used three times here, and instead of saying “people with God” it is “God with people.” His new address will be on earth, and the Lord’s

**“I SAW THE HOLY CITY,
prepared as a bride
beautifully dressed
for her husband...”**

Revelation 21:2



Prayer will be ultimately fulfilled, *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Dejavu: God is back on the earth where He started with us. *“Our Father, who art...on earth.”*

4. Relief. When I dropped a piano on my big toe years ago, I crushed it. After the doctor sewed it back together, he gave me pain medicine, telling me that I would not be able to tolerate the sheet on my toe. But Gordy had prayed that I wouldn't experience pain—and I didn't. Karen wondered if I had severed the nerves. Three days later I kicked the typewriter stand on my way by, and I yelled to Karen, “I didn't sever the nerves.” I wouldn't mind pain if it didn't hurt so much. Between pain and pleasure I'd vote for pleasure—every time. I walked around with a defensive strategy. Pain does that to us—it makes us defensive, nervous, worried, cautious, afraid. It can make us doubt God's love as well. And God plans to remove all pain in the new earth.

I spoke to a group of elderly people about heaven. One woman said, “I have five in heaven: a husband, a son, a nephew, a grand-daughter, and a friend.” She said that she now thinks of heaven constantly. So does a friend Steve Tenney, whose son contracted a rare disease and died within a few days. They were never even able to say good-bye. They celebrated his twentieth birthday—without him present. It is difficult to bury our parents, but it is inevitable. Burying our children is another matter. Heaven will reverse their awful pain.

5. Refreshment. *“To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life...Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life”* (Rev. 21:6b; 22:17). Thirst creates desire, and all desires are fulfilled in heaven. We all know the satisfaction of having our thirst quenched. Heaven is a place where nothing goes unresolved. Questions are answered, needs are satisfied, desires are granted. Few things are as basic as water. And God didn't invent some new way to satisfy thirst. Water will do just fine.

6. Responsibility. The word “city” is used eleven times in Revelation 21 and three more times in chapter 22. The word “nation” is used three times in the two chapters. For cities and nations to operate, one needs government, oversight, and delegated responsibility. The new earth will include real cities and real nations, with people who speak languages, with a diversity of cultures. Most governments are full of corruption. Imagine righteous rulers and an absence of crime. And imagine the richness of sharing God-inspired cultures with other nations. If the last chapter of the story speaks about nations, it's probably not figurative!

We will be doing some resting in the new earth. *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor...”* (Rev. 14:13). So we'll get our naps in, but we will also do some working, which I was happy to discover. The faithful servant was rewarded with authority over ten cities (Lk. 19:15-19). So how we serve here impacts how we will work there. When we studied a parable about rewards, one of our young adults said, “God rewards the responsible ones with more responsibility.” I asked, “Are you disappointed?” He was looking

to spend the first millennium in a jacuzzi. But the fact is that we love doing what we are created and gifted to do. In the new earth, we all get to, and some will have the responsibility of ruling, which is what we were created to do in the first place. Jesus promised to overcomers that they would have *“authority over the nations”* (Rev. 2:26). There's that word again! Paul wrote to Timothy that *“if we endure, we will also reign with him”* (2 Tim. 2:12). And listen to this promise concerning those purchased *“from every tribe and language and people and nation.”* God has *“made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth”* (Rev. 5:9,10). Almost sounds exciting!



**“AND WHOEVER
WISHES,
let him take the
free gift of the
water of life”**

Revelation 22:17

7. Rewards. Jesus says, *“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done”* (Rev. 22:12). Your quality of life here impacts your future destiny. Those who make it by the skin of their teeth will be glad to be there. But those who invested their lives in the kingdom of heaven while on earth will have more to do there. It is like the awards banquet at the end of the sports season. Some are glad simply to have made the team and lettered, while others will be given awards. Which might cause some to say, “Well, I’m not a Mother Teresa or a Billy Graham. I’ve never even been on a mission trip. I won’t get anything.” Let me tell you, God overlooks nothing. The issue is obedience, not flair. If you raise your children as God tells you, or if you teach Sunday School in response to His call, or even if you give *“a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, you will certainly not lose your reward”* (Matt. 10:42). The nameless saints who did what they could, who served humbly, will receive awards when Jesus returns. It is to God’s eternal tribute that He plans good works for you to do, then gives you the grace to do them, and then rewards you for your obedience. Listen to just two of the many Scriptures on rewards: *“Then men will say, ‘Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth’”* (Ps. 58:11). *“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...”* (Matt. 5:12). So listen up, Lutherans. You’ve been afraid of a theology of rewards—Jesus is not!



There will always be a thousand wonderful things going on in the new earth, and passionate people being personally loved by an ever-present God are doing it: learning, exploring, ruling, playing, praying, celebrating, eating.

Heaven is where you are home. My wife grew up as a missionary kid in Japan. Sociologists now call her a “third culture kid.” When her parents returned to the States on furlough, they told the children they were going home. But third culture kids don’t quite know where home is. When she was asked in college, “Where’s home?” she wasn’t sure how to answer. “Do you mean ‘home home’ or where I grew up or where I sort of live now?” They thought she was weird. But home was more Japan than the States, and furlough was leaving home, not going home. Some missionary kids or children of diplomats struggle with this lack of definition all their lives. They feel like vagabonds. They literally don’t have a place they can call home, which is true of us all. Peter calls us *“aliens and strangers in the world”* (1 Pe. 2:11). Let me say to you—heaven will be home.

Much of life is waiting. We wait to be born, then we wait to walk, then we wait to go to school, then we wait to graduate, then we wait to get our job. Then we wait to retire, then we wait to die. In heaven, there is no more waiting. Missionaries were returning on a boat that included some famous people. When the ship docked, the ruckus began, with people shouting their praises to the celebrities. The missionaries, who had given their lives overseas, were saddened that they had no one to receive them, to applaud their work. When they asked the Lord why not, they heard Him quietly answer, “You’re not home yet.”

The culture tries relentlessly to tell us that this is our home. Live for the “now,” not the “then.” But my passport is stamped “heaven.” I am not home until I reach that destination. Satan gives us temporal pleasures to say, “This is your home.” But don’t be fooled. This is not that. When I first saw our home on Lydia Ave., I thought, “This is nice and big.” Then I jumped the creek, ran along the path in the woods, thought about how much the kids would love all the room. I returned and whispered to Karen, “This is it.” And it has been “it” now for thirteen years. When we finally get home, we will say, “This is it!” And God will say what the customs official said to me years ago, “Welcome home!”



Paul Anderson



FROM THE SOUTH TO THE NORTH...



by Paul Anderson

... And from the warm to the cold. I took my third trip to Brazil this past June. Only this time seven from our young adult community came along. I thought this would wrap it up for me in Brazil, but after our connection with our friends in Porto Alegre in the south, we're going back again. Paulo Bohm, the pastor who hosted us, was one of about fifty pastors who left the larger Lutheran Church of Brazil three years ago, when the pressure to compromise grew intolerable. They have formed a new network, and they delight to relate with their American friends as much as we do. The team shared in teaching, ministry, much fellowship, and lots of tasty Brazilian food. I asked the leaders of the church before we left if we brought too large an entourage. They responded, "Not large enough. Please come back and bring more." So we have set a date for November 2009 to return and do ministry both in Sao Paulo as well as in the southern region.

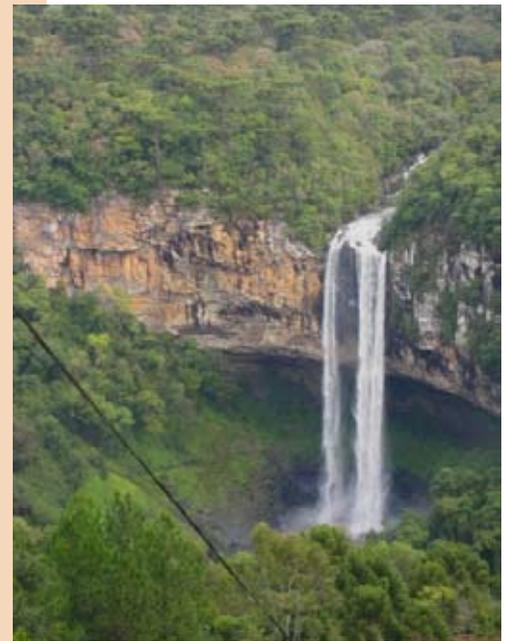


*Brazil: The four in the middle of the back row and the two on the right in the front row were from the young adult group, *Communitas*. Paul Anderson and his son Israel (not pictured) were also on this trip.*



Norway

In September, I traveled to Bergen, Norway with one of our young adults. Tim Urban wasn't expecting the kind of spectacular beauty that he saw—everywhere! Though I had seen it five times previously, I still shared his sense of wonder! It is said that God must have really loved the Norwegians, because He gave them such a beautiful country. Tim and I taught at several



Brazil

different churches, at a Bible school, and at a renewal conference. When they welcomed us to the dinner table with the common Norwegian phrase, "Vaer sa god," it took me back to my childhood when my mother invited our company on Sundays with the same words. They warmly embraced the "Dare to Dream" seminar and invited us back for their renewal conference next summer. So this full-blooded Norwegian is returning to his "homeland" once again—and probably not alone. I sure enjoy taking young adult team members along—and not as tourists. Karen and I have been telling them all along, "You can do the stuff!"



In Norway at the Bible School. Paul Anderson is the tall one in the middle of the back row. Tim Urban is the second from the right of those standing in the front row.

(While in Brazil, our team learned a fun dance to the song, "I Am Free." They taught it to those of us at the August 2008 Holy Spirit Conference. To see a live recording, go to www.LutheranRenewal.org.)

Will Our Pets Be Restored on the New Earth?

by Randy Alcorn



Teddy Siemens

Humorist Will Rogers said, “if there are no dogs in heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.” This statement was, of course, based on sentiment, not theology. However, it reflects something biblical: a God-given affection for animals. I’ve often thanked God for my golden retriever, who, when I was a boy, crawled into my sleeping bag as I lay in my backyard gazing up at the stars. Although I didn’t know God then, he touched my life through

that dog. My wife, Nanci, and I have experienced many hours of laughter and joy in animals.

Certainly people can go to unhealthy extremes with their animals. Still, though we understandably roll our eyes at pet psychologists or estates left to Siamese cats, we should ask ourselves why so many people find such companionship, solace, and joy in their pets. Is it because of sin? I believe it’s because of how God has made animals and us.

That’s why the question of whether pets will be in Heaven is not, as some assume, stupid. Animals aren’t nearly as valuable as people, but God is their Maker and has touched many people’s lives through them. It would be simple for him to re-create a pet in Heaven if he wants to. He’s the *giver* of all good gifts, not the *taker* of them. If it would please us to have a pet restored to the New Earth, that may be sufficient reason.

We know animals will be on the New Earth, which is a redeemed and renewed old Earth, in which animals had a prominent role. People will be resurrected to inhabit this world. Romans 8:21-23 assumes animals as part of a suffering creation eagerly awaiting deliverance through humanity’s resurrection. This seems to require that some animals who lived, suffered, and died on the old Earth must be made whole on the New Earth. Wouldn’t some of those likely be our pets?

In many of his writings, C. S. Lewis commented on the future of animals. He said, “It seems to me possible that certain animals may have an immortality, not in themselves, but in the immortality of their masters... Very few animals indeed, in their wild state, attain to a “self” or ego. But if any do, and it is agreeable to the goodness of God that they should live again, their immortality would also be related to man—not, this time, to individual masters, but to humanity”. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis portrayed Sarah Smith, a woman ordinary on Earth, as great in Heaven. On Earth she loved both people and animals. In Heaven she’s surrounded by the very animals she cared for on Earth.

In her excellent book about Heaven, Joni Eareckson Tada says, “If God brings our pets back to life, it wouldn’t surprise me. It would be just like Him. It would be totally in keeping with His generous character... Exorbitant. Excessive. Extravagant in grace after grace. Of all the dazzling discoveries and ecstatic pleasures heaven will hold for us, the potential of seeing Scrappy would be pure whimsy—utterly, joyfully, surprisingly superfluous...”

In a poem about the world to come, theologian John Piper writes,

*And as I knelt beside the brook
To drink eternal life, I took
A glance across the golden grass,
And saw my dog, old Blackie, fast
As she could come. She leaped the stream-
Almost- and what a happy gleam
Was in her eye. I knelt to drink,
And knew that I was on the brink
Of endless joy. And everywhere
I turned I saw a wonder there.*

Excerpt taken from Heaven, by Randy Alcorn. Used by permission of Eternal Perspective Ministries, a division of Tyndale House Publishers, copyright ©2004. All rights to this material are reserved. www.tyndale.com

(Editor’s Note: This book about heaven is one of the most comprehensive books on the subject. We highly recommend it. To purchase your copy, visit your local Christian bookstore, or order from Amazon.com.)



Lucy Anderson

Church on Fire!

By Dr. Morris Vaagenes



Church on Fire is the miraculous story of how the Lord Jesus Christ responded to one pastor's prayer, sending His Holy Spirit and fire to transform a congregation—beginning with Pastor Vaagenes himself.

Many Christians are asking in this day and age, "Can the church be revived?" The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" as Pastor Vaagenes discovered when he turned his whole heart toward seeking God's touch on his life and the life of the people of North Heights.

This book is not only a valuable history of the spiritual renewal that came to North Heights that continues to this day, but the lessons Pastor Morris learned can be applied to individuals and churches—to whoever is crying out for renewal.

(Morris Vaagenes was the senior pastor at North Heights Lutheran Church for 38 years. He also served on the Board of Lutheran Renewal for 30 years and continues to give us valuable help and wisdom. Since his retirement from North Heights, he has served as interim pastor at four churches.)

To order either of these books, please see the Resources page.



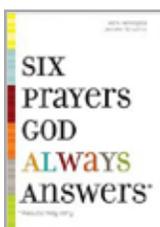
Six Prayers God Always Answers

By Dr. Mark Herringshaw



Is it okay to pray for selfish things? Does a desperate "God, help me!" count as a real prayer? Is a quickly tossed up "prayer thought" as likely to be answered as a carefully articulated and well-thought-out prayer prayed on your knees before the sun rises?

In *Six Prayers God Always Answers*, Mark Herringshaw and Jennifer Schuchmann point out that the most authentic prayers may not look, feel, or smell like the ones we were taught in Sunday School. In this book, they demonstrate that prayer isn't about a specific posture or a recitation of words, but rather the foundation of a relationship—a relationship where some unexpected results can occur.



Mark Herringshaw is on the pastoral staff at North Heights Lutheran Church. He has been a good friend of Lutheran Renewal for many years, and we are happy to recommend this book to you.

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The topics in this booklet by Larry Christenson include: Infant Baptism, Immersion, Re-baptism and Baptism with the Holy Spirit. (\$2.25)

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This book, written by Elsie Fuhrman, teaches believers how to receive empowerment of the Spirit and how to minister it to others. (\$7)

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