FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of Last Things

He Who Was, and Who Is, and Who Is to Come

UNIT 2: INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY — DEATH AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Lessons 4–6: What Happens When We Die?

Lesson 6

HEAVEN — THE PRESENT HOME OF THE REDEEMED DEAD

What Scripture Reveals About the Believer's Immediate Destiny

The Present Heaven as Real, Blessed, Provisional, and Oriented Toward the New Creation

"The present heaven is not the final heaven — but it is the presence of Christ, which is fullness of joy, and that is enough for now."

Key Texts: Revelation 4–5; 6:9–11; 7:9–17; Hebrews 12:1, 22–24; Psalm 16:11; John 14:2–3; Philippians 1:23

> *"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
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> **Titus 2:13, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Lesson 5 established the doctrine of the intermediate state: the condition of the soul between death and resurrection, characterized by conscious, blessed presence with Christ for the believer and conscious suffering for the unbeliever. This final lesson of Unit 2 turns to the more specific question of the present heaven, the actual content and character of the believer's intermediate dwelling. What is the present heaven like? What are the redeemed dead doing there? What is the nature of the joy, the worship, the rest, and the longing that characterize the life of the departed saints in the presence of Christ? These questions press with particular urgency upon the grieving, the curious, and the theologically earnest alike. And the New Testament, while maintaining appropriate reticence about the details it has not been given to disclose, provides a description of the present heaven that is far richer and more specific than popular Christianity typically assumes.

The central thesis of this lesson is captured in a distinction that is often overlooked in popular treatments of the subject: the present heaven is not the same as the eternal state. The present heaven, the realm in which the redeemed dead now dwell with Christ, is real, glorious, and overwhelmingly better than anything the present life can offer. But it is not the final, eternal, fully consummated condition that the new heavens and new earth will be at the resurrection and the renewal of all things. The present heaven is the intermediate heaven: the dwelling of Christ and the departed saints in the interval before the new creation. Understanding this distinction is essential for a biblically accurate eschatology that gives full weight both to the blessedness of the present intermediate state and to the necessity and glory of the bodily resurrection and cosmic renewal that alone constitute the final eschatological hope.

This lesson examines the present heaven under seven headings: the location and reality of the present heaven as a genuine place where Christ dwells and the departed saints reside; the throne room of God in Revelation 4–5 as a window into the ongoing heavenly reality; the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11 and the martyred saints' posture of worship, lament, and longing; the great multitude in Revelation 7:9–17 and the character of heavenly worship; the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 and the assembly of the firstborn in Hebrews 12:22–24; what the present heaven is not, the correctives against popular misconceptions; and the pastoral significance of the present heaven for the congregation's life of worship, grief, and mission. The governing conviction throughout is Psalm 16:11: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." The present heaven is above all else the presence of God in Christ, and that presence is fullness of joy.

A note about the nature of the texts we will examine: Revelation 4–5, 6:9–11, and 7:9–17 are visionary and symbolic texts, written in the apocalyptic genre we examined in Lesson 2. They do not give us a literal, photographic description of the present heaven in the way a travel documentary might describe a physical location. They give us a theologically and symbolically rich portrayal of heavenly realities in the genre and imagery of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic, a portrayal that is genuinely revelatory precisely because the Spirit who inspired it is the Spirit who inhabits that heaven and knows its character from the inside. We read these texts with the literary sensitivity the genre requires and the theological trust the Spirit's inspiration warrants, drawing from them the genuine content they are designed to convey without pressing their symbolic details beyond their intended scope.

I. THE LOCATION AND REALITY OF THE PRESENT HEAVEN

Heaven as an Actual Place Where Christ Dwells

A. Heaven Is a Real Place, Not Merely a Condition

One of the most important affirmations the biblical doctrine of the present heaven makes is that heaven is a real place, not merely a spiritual condition, not a metaphor for human flourishing, not a psychological state of peace, and not a convenient fiction for consoling the bereaved. Heaven is the actual dwelling place of God as He makes Himself present in created reality, the realm where His presence is most immediately and fully concentrated, where His throne is set, and where the company of angels and the departed saints dwell in His presence. This is not a Platonic realm of pure forms existing in abstraction from matter; it is a created realm with its own genuine order and reality, and it is where Christ, in His glorified resurrection body, has been dwelling since the ascension.

The ascension of Christ is the foundational event that makes the present heaven what it is for the departed believer. Acts 1:9–11 describes the ascension in explicit spatial terms: Jesus was lifted up, a cloud received Him out of the disciples' sight, and the angels promised that this same Jesus would return in the same way He had gone. He went somewhere, into the presence of the Father, to the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3), to the position of universal lordship that was promised to the Son of David (Acts 2:33–36). The session of Christ at the Father's right hand is not a metaphor for abstract divine power; it is the spatial and relational location of the risen, glorified, embodied Jesus, who has carried human nature into the presence of God and who now intercedes for His people from that position of supreme authority (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34).

That the present heaven is a real place where a real Person dwells in a glorified resurrection body is significant for what it means for the departed saints who are with Christ. They are not in a condition of pure disembodied spiritual abstraction; they are with the embodied, glorified Christ in the real place He inhabits. They are in His presence, surrounded by the worshipping community of angels (Hebrews 12:22), attended by the covenant reality of the assembly of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23), and waiting for the resurrection that will reunite their souls with their own glorified bodies. The present heaven is not a waiting room with nothing in it; it is the throne room of the universe, inhabited by the glorified Son of God, thronged by the company of heaven, and filled with the worship that the entire created order will one day join.

B. John 14:2–3 and the Father's House

The most personal and the most directly pastoral statement Jesus makes about the present heaven is found in His farewell discourse in John 14:2–3: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." The context is the impending departure of Jesus, His death, resurrection, and ascension, and the grief of the disciples who do not yet understand what His departure means or where He is going. His answer is a promise of place and presence: a Father's house with many rooms, a prepared place, a coming again to receive them.

The word translated "dwelling places" (monai), in older translations, "mansions", simply means "rooms" or "abiding places." The image is of a household with abundant room for many members, not a single cramped space

but a generous, well-prepared, capacious dwelling. The Father's house is a place of belonging, of rest, of permanent residency rather than temporary sojourn. Jesus is going to prepare these places, and He is coming back to bring His disciples there. The promise is both spatial (there is a real place being prepared) and relational (the purpose of being in that place is to be where Jesus is). The disciples' grief at His departure is answered not with philosophical consolation about the impermanence of attachment but with the concrete promise of reunion in a prepared place.

The two-part structure of John 14:2–3, the going to prepare a place (the ascension and the present heaven), and the coming again to receive them (the parousia and the final state), captures exactly the two-stage eschatological framework we have been working with throughout this unit. The present heaven is the place being prepared: real, personal, Christocentric, and more than adequate for the company that will inhabit it. The return of Christ is the completion of the promise: He who went away comes back to bring all His own to the place He has prepared, so that where He is, there they may be also, not in the provisional intimacy of the present heaven, but in the consummated intimacy of the new creation, face to face with the One who prepared the place and who is Himself the best thing in it.

II. THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD, REVELATION 4–5

The Ongoing Heavenly Reality the Present Heaven Is Centered Upon

A. Revelation 4, The Throne and Its Worship

Revelation 4 and 5 provide the most sustained and theologically rich vision of the present heaven in the entire New Testament. John is caught up in the Spirit into the heavenly realm and given a vision of the throne of God, surrounded by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, all engaged in unceasing worship of the One who sits upon the throne. The chapter opens with the simple and staggering declaration: "Behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne" (4:2). The entire chapter radiates outward from this central reality: the throne, and the One upon it. Everything else in the heavenly vision, the elders, the living creatures, the sea of glass, the rainbow, the flashes of lightning and the voices, exists in relation to and in the presence of the One who is enthroned.

The throne of Revelation 4 is not a static image or a merely architectural feature; it is the organizing center of the entire heavenly reality. From it proceed the lightning and voices that express the awfulness of the divine majesty (v. 5). Before it burn the seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, the fullness of the Holy Spirit in His illuminating and purifying presence (v. 5). Around it is the sea of glass like crystal, expressing the transcendence and holiness of the God who dwells there (v. 6). And around the throne are the four living creatures, drawn from the imagery of Ezekiel's throne-chariot vision, who give unceasing worship: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (v. 8). The worship of heaven is the Trisagion, the thrice-holy acclamation of the divine majesty, offered without pause, without fatigue, and without diminishment. This is the environment in which the departed saints dwell.

The twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:4, 9–11 represent the fullness of the redeemed community of God across both testaments, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles gathered into a single representative body before the throne. They are clothed in white garments (the righteousness of Christ) and wear golden crowns (the

honor given to those who have overcome). When the four living creatures give glory to the One on the throne, the elders fall before Him, cast their crowns before the throne, and cry out: "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created" (v. 11). The casting of the crowns is the most eloquent possible gesture of eschatological worship, the acknowledgment that every honor the redeemed possess has been given to them by God, and that the appropriate response to divine honor is to return it to the One from whom it came. The present heaven is a place of this kind of worship: lavish, selfless, adoring, and grounded in the recognition of God's absolute sovereignty and worthiness.

B. *Revelation 5, The Lamb and the New Song*

Revelation 5 adds the Christological center to the theocentric vision of chapter 4. John weeps because no one is found worthy to open the scroll of judgment and redemption, until one of the elders announces: "Behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals" (v. 5). John turns and sees not a lion but a Lamb, "a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth" (v. 6). The Lamb takes the scroll, and the entire heavenly assembly erupts in worship: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders with their golden bowls of incense, "which are the prayers of the saints" (v. 8), fall before the Lamb and sing a new song.

The new song of Revelation 5:9–10 is the anthem of the present heaven, and it is worth hearing in full: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." The song is new not in the sense of recently composed but in the sense of the eschatologically new that the resurrection has inaugurated: it is the song that could not be sung before the cross, because it is the song of accomplished redemption, of purchased people, of the Lamb who was slain and who has overcome. Its content is the atonement. Its scope is universal, every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. And its vision is forward-looking: those who have been purchased will reign upon the earth, a reference to the new creation that is still coming.

The vision escalates to cosmic proportions as the angels join in, "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (v. 11), and then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth adds its voice to the doxology: "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (v. 13). The present heaven, as Revelation 5 depicts it, is not the private possession of a select spiritual elite; it is the gathering point of all created worship, the place where heaven and earth's adoration of the triune God converges in the most concentrated and exalted expression available in the present age. The departed saints who are with Christ are participating in this: in the worship of the Lamb, in the prayers of the saints rising as golden incense before the throne, and in the great choral harmony that the entire creation will one day join at full voice when the new creation arrives.

III. THE SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR, REVELATION 6:9–11

The Martyred Saints in Worship, Lament, and Longing

A. The Location and Activity of the Martyred Souls

Lesson 5 introduced the vision of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11 as evidence for the conscious activity of the departed saints in the intermediate state. This lesson gives that text fuller attention for what it reveals about the character and the conditions of the present heaven for those who have died for the faith. The fifth seal vision places the souls of the martyred saints "underneath the altar", a location drawn from the Old Testament imagery of the base of the altar of burnt offering, where the blood of the sacrifice was poured out (Leviticus 4:7). The placement of the souls under the altar is a declaration of their status: they are sacrifices, offered up in the service of God and His gospel, and their blood, like the blood of Abel that cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:10; Hebrews 11:4), cries before the throne for the justice that has not yet come.

The martyred souls are given white robes, the symbol throughout Revelation of the righteousness of Christ and the vindicated status of the redeemed, and they are told to "rest for a little while longer" until the number of their fellow servants who are to be killed is complete (v. 11). The word "rest" (anapausomai) here is significant: it is the same word used in Revelation 14:13, where the voice from heaven declares, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" The present heaven is a place of rest from the particular labors of earthly life, not a passive or boring inactivity, but the relief of one who has finished a demanding work and is now in the presence of the One for whom it was done.

The cry of the martyred souls, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (v. 10), is one of the most theologically dense utterances in Revelation. It is simultaneously a lament, a prayer, and an expression of eschatological longing. The saints in the present heaven are not in a condition of passive and unreflective bliss; they are aware of the situation on earth, they know that the justice they died for has not yet fully arrived, and they cry out to God for its vindication. Their prayer is addressed to the One who is "holy and true", whose holiness demands that injustice be judged and whose truth guarantees that the promise of vindication will be fulfilled. And the answer they receive is not an immediate resolution but a divine "soon": rest a little while longer, until the number is complete. The present heaven is characterized, in part, by this eschatological longing, a longing that is itself a form of worship, a prayer that aligns the desires of the saints with the purposes of God.

B. The Pastoral Significance of the Altar Vision

The vision of the souls under the altar has significant pastoral implications that deserve to be named explicitly. First, it confirms the consciousness and the personal identity of the departed saints: they cry out with a loud voice, they address God by title ("holy and true"), they articulate a specific request, and they receive a specific response. They are not dissolved into an impersonal spiritual realm; they are fully themselves, fully articulate, and fully engaged with the living God in a relationship of prayer and petition that is more direct and more immediate than any prayer available to the church on earth. This is a specific form of comfort for those who have lost loved ones

in faith: the one they buried is not a passive observer or an unconscious sleeper but an active participant in the heavenly worship and intercession that surrounds the throne.

Second, the vision reveals that the present heaven is not a place of total eschatological satisfaction. The saints under the altar are longing for something they do not yet have, the vindication of their blood, the judgment of their persecutors, the completion of the redemptive purposes of God in history. This longing is not a form of suffering or deprivation in the sense that would diminish the blessedness of the intermediate state; it is the holy longing of those whose hearts are fully aligned with the heart of God, who want what God wants and who wait for it with the patience that the divine "soon" sustains. But it is a longing, and it establishes once more that the present heaven, for all its glory, is not yet the final heaven. The departed saints are not at the end of the story; they are, like us, waiting for the chapter that only Christ's return can begin.

Third, the vision of the martyred saints praying for the vindication of their blood is a profound statement about the continuity of the saints' awareness across the barrier of death. They are aware that there are still servants being killed on earth. They are aware that the judgment has not yet come. They are aware of the existence of the earthly community of faith that is still engaged in the mission and suffering that they themselves completed in death. Whether this awareness extends to specific knowledge of earthly events or to specific intercession for named individuals is not established by this text and should not be pressed beyond what it says. But the broad awareness of the earthly situation, the ongoing suffering of the church, the unrealized justice, the incomplete number, is explicitly affirmed. The saints in the present heaven are not separated from the concerns of the church on earth by an absolute wall of unawareness; they are praying for the completion of what they began.

IV. THE GREAT MULTITUDE, REVELATION 7:9–17

The Character of Heavenly Worship and the Comfort of the Redeemed

A. A Great Multitude from Every Nation

Revelation 7:9–17 provides the most expansive and the most emotionally powerful vision of the redeemed in the present heaven in the entire New Testament. John sees "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands." The universality of the vision is staggering: every nation, every tribe, every people, every tongue. The redemptive purpose of God that was promised to Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3), has been fulfilled. The table of nations that was scattered at Babel is gathered before the throne. The gospel that went out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth has accomplished its purpose. And the great crowd stands before the Lamb, not distant, not excluded, not separated from the one they worship by the ancient barriers of ethnicity, language, and geography, but together, one, in the presence of the One who purchased them from every corner of creation.

The cry of the great multitude is the simplest and most comprehensive doxology in all of Scripture: "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (v. 10). The word "salvation" (soteria) here is not a cry for deliverance, they are already delivered. It is a declaration of attribution: salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb; it is their achievement, their gift, their accomplishment. The great crowd does not celebrate themselves; they celebrate the One who saved them and the Lamb who was slain to accomplish it. This is the defining posture of

heavenly worship: not self-congratulation at having made the right choices, not relief at having escaped punishment, but the overwhelming, self-forgetful adoration of the God whose grace has done what no human effort could accomplish and given what no human merit could earn.

The elder's identification of the great multitude in verses 13–14 is one of the most important pastoral statements in the book: "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." On the amillennial reading, "the great tribulation" is not a specific future seven-year period but the entire experience of suffering and persecution that the church endures throughout the inter-advent age, the tribulation that Jesus promised His disciples in John 16:33 ("In the world you have tribulation") and that the apostolic church understood itself to be in the midst of from its earliest days. The great crowd before the throne is composed of those who suffered for the faith in every generation, who were washed clean by the blood of the Lamb they trusted, and who now stand in the presence of the One for whom they endured. They are not a future category of tribulation survivors; they are the full company of the redeemed drawn from the entire inter-advent period.

B. *The Conditions of Heavenly Existence, Verses 15–17*

Verses 15–17 provide the most specific description of the experiential conditions of the present heaven in the New Testament, and they are worth examining in careful detail: "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." The density of pastoral promise in these three verses is extraordinary, and it deserves to be opened slowly.

They serve God "day and night in His temple": the present heaven is a place of active service, not passive rest. The word "serve" (latreuousin) is the same word used for the worship service of the temple priests, it is liturgical, devotional, relational service in the immediate presence of God. The departed saints are not idle in heaven; they are engaged in the highest and most fulfilling activity available to any created being: the worship and service of the living God in His own presence. "He will spread His tabernacle over them": the divine presence, symbolized by the Shekinah glory of the tabernacle, is not merely in the vicinity of the saints, it is over them, sheltering them, enveloping them. God Himself is their dwelling, their covering, their protection.

"They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them": the physical privations of earthly suffering are ended. Every form of material need and deprivation that the saints suffered for the faith, including the literal hunger, thirst, and exposure of those who suffered persecution in the ancient world, has been permanently relieved. "The Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd": the most tender and most personal image of all. The One who is simultaneously the Lamb (sacrificial, redeemer) and the Shepherd (protecting, guiding, providing) is at the center. And "God will wipe every tear from their eyes": this phrase, repeated with slight variation in the fully consummated eternal state of Revelation 21:4, here applies in its present-heaven form to the sorrow and suffering that accompanied the saints through their earthly lives. The tears that accumulated across a lifetime of following Christ in a world that did not want Him are being wiped away, gently, personally, by the hand of the One who knows every tear and has gathered them all (Psalm 56:8).

V. THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRSTBORN, HEBREWS 12:22–24

The Full Community of the Present Heaven

A. The Heavenly Jerusalem and Its Inhabitants

The most comprehensive and the most theologically structured description of the present heaven's community in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 12:22–24, where the author sets before his readers the full assembly to which they have already come, not in a future sense but in the present tense of new covenant access: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel." The passage is remarkable for the present-tense access it describes: the congregation that gathers for worship on earth, under the new covenant in Christ's blood, is already, now, in this age, gathered with the entire heavenly assembly.

The assembly catalogued in Hebrews 12:22–24 has several distinct members, and each contributes to the picture of the present heaven's community. The "myriads of angels": the angelic host surrounds the throne and participates in the worship of Revelation 5:11–12 and Daniel 7:10. The "general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven": the full community of the redeemed across both Testaments, those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. "God, the Judge of all": the divine majesty at the center of the assembly, not yet fully exercising the judgment that belongs to the final day but present as the One to whom all accountability is ultimately directed. "The spirits of the righteous made perfect": the departed saints in the intermediate state, whose righteousness has been completed or brought to its eschatological fullness in the presence of Christ, the best biblical description of what the saints in the intermediate state have become.

The phrase "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" deserves particular attention. The word "perfected" (teteleiomenon) is the Hebrews writer's characteristic term for the eschatological completion or fulfillment of what was only partially realized under the old covenant. In Hebrews 11:40, the same word appears: the old covenant saints could not be "perfected" apart from "us", that is, apart from the new covenant community that stands on the far side of Christ's atoning death and resurrection. Now, in Hebrews 12:23, the departed saints are described as having been perfected: their partial old covenant experience has been completed by the full reality of the new covenant's eschatological blessings, including immediate access to the presence of Christ, the removal of the veil that separated them from the fullness of the divine glory, and the application of the blood that speaks better than Abel's. The present heaven, for the departed saints, is the place where the long journey toward completion has at last arrived at its intermediate destination.

B. The Present Tense of Heavenly Access Under the New Covenant

The most striking feature of Hebrews 12:22–24 for the living congregation is its present-tense framing: "you have come." Not "you will come" at the resurrection, or "you shall come" at the return of Christ, but "you have come", now, in this age, through the new covenant access that Christ's blood has opened. The congregation that gathers for worship on earth is genuinely, presently, and really gathered with the full heavenly assembly. The veil has been

torn. The curtain that separated the holy of holies from the congregation of Israel has been removed by the body of Christ (Hebrews 10:20). Every act of corporate worship in the new covenant community is an act of worship that joins the worship already in progress in the throne room of heaven.

This has profound implications for the church's understanding of its own worship. When the congregation of Crosspoint Fellowship gathers on the Lord's Day to pray, to sing, to hear the Word proclaimed, and to observe the ordinances, it is not gathering in isolation from the wider community of the redeemed. It is joining, in the new covenant access that the blood of Jesus has opened, the worship that is already and always in progress in the throne room of God. The angels are there. The spirits of the righteous made perfect are there. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, is there. God, the Judge of all, is there. And the congregation on earth, by the Spirit who unites the body of Christ across every temporal and spatial barrier, is there too. The Lord's Day worship is not a pale anticipation of a future heavenly event; it is a real, present participation in the heavenly reality that Hebrews 12:22–24 describes.

This present-tense access to the heavenly assembly also answers one of the most common questions people ask about the intermediate state: are the departed saints aware of what is happening in the church on earth? The Hebrews passage suggests that the answer is at least partially yes, not in the sense of a surveillance-like omniscience of earthly events, but in the sense of a genuine membership in the same community of worship. The departed saints who are with Christ are gathered around the same throne that the living congregation joins in worship. They are in the presence of the same mediator who intercedes for the living church. They share in the same new covenant reality that the earthly congregation inhabits. The barrier is real, death has separated the living from the dead in a way that grief is right to mourn. But the union is also real, and the worship that the living and the dead offer together, around the same throne, to the same Lamb, is a foretaste of the gathering that the resurrection will make permanently and fully embodied.

VI. WHAT THE PRESENT HEAVEN IS NOT

Correcting Popular Misconceptions

A. Heaven Is Not Clouds, Harps, and Boredom

Popular culture's image of heaven is simultaneously pervasive and impoverished: disembodied souls floating on clouds, playing harps, wearing white sheets, and engaging in an activity that most people privately suspect they would find unendurably dull within a few hours. This caricature is so deeply embedded in the cultural imagination that it functions as a genuine obstacle to the kind of genuine hope the biblical doctrine of the present heaven is designed to produce. People who have heard the gospel, who believe in some vague afterlife, and who perhaps even believe in Christ's resurrection, find that they cannot muster genuine longing for the heaven of popular imagination, because that heaven offers nothing that their deepest desires actually want.

The biblical description of the present heaven, the throne room of the living God, thronged with the worshipping assembly of angels and departed saints, centered on the crucified and risen Lamb, filled with the new song of accomplished redemption, characterized by active service and the wiping of every tear and the guiding of the redeemed to springs of living water, is not this. It is not passive. It is not boring. It is not a sanitized version of earthly leisure extended indefinitely. It is the most intense, most purposeful, most fully human existence available

to a person in a condition of incomplete eschatological realization. It is the presence of Christ, which Psalm 16:11 declares is "fullness of joy" and "pleasures forevermore." The joy of the present heaven is not the tepid contentment of the satisfied tourist; it is the overwhelming, self-forgetful, endlessly renewable joy of being in the immediate presence of the most beautiful, most loving, most utterly worthy Person in the universe.

The pastoral problem with the harp-and-cloud caricature is not merely that it is inaccurate; it is that it fails to motivate. The person who secretly thinks of heaven as an eternity of church choir practice on a cloud will not find their love for Christ deepened by the prospect of heaven, their grief at the death of a loved one genuinely comforted by the promise of where that person now is, or their daily life shaped by the knowledge of the world they are heading toward. The person who has genuinely grasped the present heaven as the Scripture describes it, who understands that their deceased spouse is in the immediate, joyful, worshipping presence of Jesus Christ, surrounded by the full assembly of the redeemed, serving God day and night in the temple, with every tear wiped from their eyes, that person has a specific, concrete, theologically grounded hope that genuinely transforms their grief and shapes their life.

B. *The Present Heaven Is Not the Final Heaven*

The second and theologically more important corrective is the one this lesson has been carrying throughout: the present heaven is not the final, eternal state. This distinction matters enormously for a biblically accurate eschatology. If the present heaven, the disembodied intermediate state of the departed soul in the presence of Christ, is treated as the final destination of the redeemed, then the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the cosmos become theological afterthoughts, optional additions to a hope that is already complete. And this is, in fact, the functional eschatology of a great deal of popular Christianity: death takes the believer to heaven, and that is the end of the story. The resurrection is affirmed in the creed and then promptly forgotten.

But the New Testament is unambiguous: the present heaven is not the end of the story. The souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11 are waiting. The spirits of the righteous made perfect in Hebrews 12:23 are in a condition that Hebrews 11:40 implies is still incomplete without the full new covenant community that the resurrection will bring. Paul's desire to "depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23) is held alongside his expectation that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Philippians 3:20–21). The present heaven is the intermediate state of souls who are with Christ; the final state is the resurrection existence of embodied, glorified people dwelling in the new creation. These are not the same thing, and conflating them diminishes both.

The distinction between the present heaven and the final heaven is also important for what it preserves about the goodness and redemptive significance of the material world. If the final destiny of the redeemed is a disembodied existence in a purely spiritual heaven, then matter is ultimately left behind, the body is ultimately discarded, and the created world is ultimately abandoned. But if the final destiny of the redeemed is a resurrection existence in new heavens and new earth, embodied, material, physical, glorified, then the created order matters eschatologically. The body matters. The earth matters. The cultural work the redeemed did in their earthly lives matters, because the new creation is the renewal and glorification of the same creation in which that work was done, not its replacement with something utterly discontinuous. The present heaven is precious. But the new creation is the goal, and the resurrection body is the hope. We await both with longing and with joy.

VII. THE PASTORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT HEAVEN

How This Doctrine Forms the Congregation's Worship, Grief, and Mission

A. Heaven and the Transformation of Congregational Worship

The doctrine of the present heaven, received with genuine theological depth and devotional seriousness, is one of the most powerful transformers of congregational worship available to the local church. When the congregation understands that its Sunday gathering is a real participation in the worship that is already in progress around the throne, that the angels are there, that the spirits of the righteous made perfect are there, that Jesus the mediator is there, and that the full company of the redeemed across all time and space is gathered around the same throne to which the congregation's praise is addressed, it changes the character of worship fundamentally. Worship is no longer a weekly performance for the encouragement of the gathered membership; it is a genuine participation in the eschatological liturgy of the throne room of God.

This understanding of worship as heavenly participation has deep roots in the Reformed and Puritan tradition. John Calvin's theology of worship was shaped by the conviction that the earthly congregation's praise joins the praise of the heavenly community. The Westminster Directory for Public Worship understands the Lord's Day gathering as an anticipation of the eschatological rest. And the Second London Baptist Confession's theology of the Lord's Supper includes the dimension of eschatological participation: the table is observed "until He comes," with the forward-looking orientation that places every observance within the framework of the heavenly reality it anticipates and the parousia it announces. The congregation that worships with this awareness is a congregation whose worship is charged with the weight of the eschatological community surrounding it, enriched by the voices of those who have gone before, and oriented toward the completion that the return of Christ will bring.

Practically, this means that the elements of congregational worship that most directly reflect the heavenly reality deserve to be received with particular intentionality. The singing of the psalms and hymns, which often reproduce the very language of the heavenly doxologies in Revelation 4–5 and 7:9–17, is not merely an emotional warm-up for the sermon; it is the earthly congregation's participation in the worship the departed saints are already offering around the throne. The reading and proclamation of Scripture, the Word that the living God has spoken and that the Son is the living fulfillment of, is not merely an educational exercise; it is the earthly community's encounter with the same Christ who is the center of the heavenly worship. The Lord's Supper, the table of remembrance that proclaims His death until He comes, is the church's most concentrated act of participation in the new song of Revelation 5, the anthem of accomplished redemption. The present heaven doctrine, received in worship, turns the ordinary Sunday gathering into something extraordinary.

B. Heaven and the Formation of Christian Grief and Mission

The doctrine of the present heaven completes the Unit 2 trilogy on individual eschatology by providing the most specific and the most affirmatively hopeful account of where the dead in Christ are and what they are doing. Lesson 4 established that death is the last enemy whose sting has been removed in Christ. Lesson 5 established the conscious, blessed, Christocentric character of the intermediate state and refuted three major errors. This lesson has filled in the content of that intermediate state with the richest biblical descriptions available, the throne

room, the great multitude, the altar, the cloud of witnesses, the assembly of the firstborn, and has identified clearly what the present heaven is and what it is not. The congregation that has received all three lessons possesses a biblical theology of death and the afterlife that is simultaneously unflinching in its realism about death, specific in its hope for the dead, and oriented toward the resurrection as the completion of what the present heaven only partially realizes.

The pastoral application for grief is immediate. When the members of this congregation stand at the graveside of a fellow believer, they are not saying goodbye to someone who has vanished into uncertainty. They are releasing a member of the earthly congregation into the fuller community of the heavenly assembly. The person they are burying is not lost, not asleep, not in purgatory, and not hovering somewhere in an indefinite spiritual space. They are with Christ. They are in the presence of the Lamb who was slain for them. They are singing the new song. They are being guided to springs of the water of life. Every tear that was shed in their earthly life has been wiped away by the hand of God. They are at rest from their labors. They are waiting, with the great company of the redeemed across all time, for the resurrection morning that will bring them back in glory. That is the specific, textually grounded, pastorally sufficient word that this doctrine gives to the grieving. It is not a consoling fiction; it is the testimony of the Spirit who inspired the visions of Patmos and who inhabits the very heaven that John was given to see.

The application for mission is equally clear. The great multitude of Revelation 7:9 is composed of people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, and that vision is not yet complete. The mission that the exalted Christ has commissioned (Matthew 28:18–20) is the process by which that multitude is being gathered. Every person who hears the gospel and trusts the Lamb has their robe washed white and their name added to the company before the throne. Every act of faithful evangelism, every cross-cultural mission endeavor, every faithful proclamation of the Word in season and out of season is contributing to the filling out of the great multitude that John saw. The doctrine of the present heaven is not a comfort that diminishes the urgency of mission by suggesting that everyone will find their way to the throne eventually; it is a vision of the goal of mission that makes every act of evangelism a contribution to an assembly that will one day stand before the throne in its full, uncountable, every-nation glory. The present heaven is the destination of those who are being reached by the gospel, and that makes the gospel worth every sacrifice it demands.

> *"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."*
>
> **Psalm 16:11, NASB 1995**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Present Heaven	The intermediate dwelling of the redeemed dead: the realm where Christ is presently enthroned and where the departed saints in the intermediate state dwell with Him in conscious, blessed fellowship. Distinguished from the eternal state or final heaven, which is the new heavens and new earth that will exist after the resurrection and the renewal of the cosmos. The present heaven is real, glorious, and Christocentric, but it is provisional, incomplete, and oriented toward the resurrection as its necessary fulfillment.
Eternal State / Final Heaven	The fully consummated eschatological condition that will obtain after the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the renewal of the cosmos, the new heavens and new earth described in Revelation 21–22. Distinguished from the present heaven (the intermediate state) in that it is embodied (in resurrection bodies), permanent (not provisional), and fully complete (not awaiting any further development). The eternal state is the final and irreversible form of the redeemed community's existence with the triune God.
The Trisagion	The thrice-holy acclamation of the divine majesty: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty" (Revelation 4:8; cf. Isaiah 6:3). The characteristic worship of the four living creatures around the throne in the present heaven. Drawn from Isaiah's vision of the divine throne room (Isaiah 6:1–3) and indicating the absolute holiness of God, the quality that sets Him infinitely apart from all created being. The Trisagion is the unceasing antiphon of the present heaven's worship.
New Song	The anthem of the heavenly worship in Revelation 5:9–10, sung by the four living creatures and twenty-four elders before the Lamb: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." "New" not in the sense of recently composed but in the eschatological sense of the song that the accomplishment of redemption in Christ has made possible for the first time, the song that could not have been sung before the cross.
Spirits of the Righteous Made Perfect	The description in Hebrews 12:23 of the departed saints in the intermediate state: "the spirits of the righteous made perfect." "Made perfect" (teteleiomenon) refers to the eschatological completion or fulfillment of the saints' experience in Christ, the condition in which the partial and provisional character of old covenant (and inter-advent) experience has been brought to its eschatological completion in the immediate presence of Christ. The best biblical description of what the saints in the intermediate state have become.
Session of Christ	The present heavenly reign of the risen, glorified, ascended Jesus Christ "at the right hand of the Father." Grounded in Psalm 110:1 ("Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet") and applied to Christ throughout the New Testament (Acts 2:33–36; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12–13; Ephesians 1:20–23). Christ's session is not metaphorical; it is the actual spatial and relational location of the glorified, bodily risen Son of God, from which He intercedes for His people and rules over all things on behalf of His church.
Latreia	Greek for worship or service, from which the verb latreuousin (they serve) is derived in Revelation 7:15: "they serve Him day and night in His temple." In the Old Testament, latreia designated the cultic service of the priests in the tabernacle and temple, the liturgical worship offered to God as the expression of covenant relationship. In Revelation 7:15, the service of the great multitude before the throne is this kind of priestly, liturgical, relational service: active, purposeful, and offered in the immediate presence of God.
General Assembly (Panegyris)	The Greek word in Hebrews 12:22 sometimes translated "festive assembly" or "joyful gathering": the joyful, celebratory convocation of the full redeemed community in the present heaven. The term connotes the kind of festive gathering associated with the great religious

	festivals of the ancient world, a gathering charged with celebration, communal identity, and the presence of the divine. The present heaven is characterized by this kind of festive, joyful corporate assembly.
Parousia	Greek for "presence" or "arrival," the primary New Testament term for the return of Christ. In the context of Lesson 6, the parousia is the event that terminates the present heaven (the intermediate state) and inaugurates the eternal state (the new creation): at the return of Christ, the departed saints' souls are reunited with their resurrection bodies, the living saints are transformed, and the new creation is inaugurated. The present heaven points forward to the parousia as its necessary completion.
Eschatological Longing	The holy desire that characterizes both the living church and the departed saints for the full consummation of God's redemptive purposes. In the church on earth, it is expressed in the groaning of Romans 8:23 and the Maranatha prayer of Revelation 22:20. In the present heaven, it is expressed in the "How long, O Lord?" of Revelation 6:10. Eschatological longing is not a form of dissatisfaction with the grace God has already given; it is the holy alignment of the creature's desire with the Creator's purposes, the longing for what God Himself is moving all things toward.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the present heaven is a real place, the actual dwelling of Christ in His glorified resurrection body, the actual location of the throne room of God, the actual home of the departed saints who are with Christ. Heaven is not a metaphor for human flourishing, not a condition of psychological peace, and not a convenient fiction for the grieving. It is the most real and the most glorious place in the created universe, and the people who are there are more vividly alive, more fully themselves, and more genuinely joyful than any person on earth. The reality of the present heaven is the foundation of everything the church says to the dying and to the grieving.

We must also believe the crucial distinction this lesson has insisted upon: the present heaven is not the final heaven. The present heaven is the intermediate state of souls who are with Christ but not yet in their resurrection bodies; the final heaven is the new creation in which the redeemed will dwell in glorified resurrection bodies forever. This distinction matters for the resurrection hope, it ensures that the resurrection is genuinely necessary and genuinely anticipated, not reduced to a theological formality that adds nothing significant to an already-complete intermediate existence. And it matters for our theology of the material world, it reminds us that matter matters eschatologically, that bodies matter eschatologically, and that the goal of redemption is not the escape of the soul from the physical but the glorification of the whole person in a renewed creation.

We must believe that the worship of the present heaven is the reality in which our own Sunday worship participates. Hebrews 12:22–24 describes our access to the heavenly assembly in the present tense: "you have come." Every Lord's Day, the congregation that gathers for worship joins the worship already in progress around the throne. The angels are there. The spirits of the righteous made perfect are there. Jesus the mediator is there. This belief does not merely add a sentimental dimension to Sunday worship; it transforms its character fundamentally. Worship is not a human production for human benefit; it is a genuine participation in the eschatological liturgy of the throne room of God, and it calls for a seriousness, a joy, and a reverence commensurate with the company it joins.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

We should feel a genuine, specific longing for the present heaven that is grounded in its content rather than in a vague desire to escape earthly difficulty. The person who longs for heaven because they are tired and suffering has a real longing, and it is not wrong. But the person who longs for heaven because they want to be with Christ, to see the Lamb who was slain enthroned in glory, to join the great multitude from every nation in the new song of accomplished redemption, to have every tear wiped away by the hand of God, that person has the specifically Christian eschatological longing that the Bible is designed to produce. The present heaven doctrine is meant to give the longing its content, to fill the vague desire to "be in a better place" with the specific, Christocentric, doxological richness that the throne room of Revelation 4–5 provides.

We should feel a deep gratitude for every person who has died in faith, because they are in a condition that is better for them than anything we can currently offer them. The grief of bereavement is appropriate and genuine. But it is the grief of those who are missing someone who is in a better place, specifically, personally, magnificently better. They are with Christ. They are singing the new song. They are being guided to springs of living water. They are at rest from their labors. The gratitude that this evokes is not for the fact of their death but for the destination

to which their faith has brought them, and for the One who prepared that destination and who is Himself the best thing in it.

We should desire to worship on earth in a way that is worthy of the heavenly reality our worship joins. The congregation whose worship is marked by distraction, casualness, and self-referential entertainment has not understood what Hebrews 12:22–24 says about where it is and whose presence it is in. The congregation that worships with reverence and joy, with attention to the Word and the ordinances, with hearts set on the Lamb rather than on the preferences of the worshippers, that congregation has grasped something essential about the present heaven's character and has begun to reflect it in its earthly gathering.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Revelation 4–5 in its entirety this week, slowly, as an act of devotional imagination: place yourself in the scene. You are John, caught up in the Spirit into the throne room. You see the One on the throne. You hear the four living creatures' unceasing Trisagion. You watch the elders cast their crowns. You hear the new song of the Lamb who was slain. What do you feel? What does this vision do to your desire for heaven? What does it do to the quality of your desire to be there? Write a brief reflection and bring it to the next session.
- Read Revelation 7:9–17, paying specific attention to the description of the conditions of the great multitude in verses 15–17. List each element: before the throne, serving day and night, sheltered by God's presence, free from hunger and thirst and heat, guided by the Shepherd-Lamb, tears wiped away. Now ask: which of these elements speaks most directly to where you are in your own life right now? What specific sorrow, burden, or deprivation does it address? Let this text be a pastoral word to yourself before you bring it to others.
- Examine the worship life of your congregation in light of the Hebrews 12:22–24 conviction that Sunday worship is a real participation in the heavenly assembly. Are there specific elements of your congregation's worship that would be strengthened by a more deliberate awareness of this reality? Are there ways in which the congregation's worship has become too self-referential or too focused on the preferences and comfort of the earthly participants? Name them honestly, and consider how the present heaven doctrine might form a gentle and constructive corrective.
- Take one of the hymns or songs your congregation regularly sings and identify its connection to the heavenly worship of Revelation 4–5 or 7:9–17. What language does it share with the great multitude's doxology? With the new song of the Lamb? With the Trisagion? Share your finding with the congregation in a brief note, a conversation with your pastor, or a contribution to the next study session. The goal is to deepen the congregation's awareness that the hymns they sing are participating in something larger than themselves.
- As this unit on individual eschatology concludes, take stock of what Lessons 4, 5, and 6 have given you: a biblical theology of death, the intermediate state, and the present heaven. Write a brief personal summary, a paragraph for each lesson, of the most important thing each lesson has given you. Then identify the one question that remains most alive for you as Unit 3 (The Kingdom of God) begins. Carry that question into the next unit as a productive theological companion.

Key Texts: *Revelation 4–5; 6:9–11; 7:9–17; Hebrews 12:1, 22–24; Psalm 16:11; John 14:2–3; Philippians 1:23*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before this lesson, what was your mental image of the present heaven, what the dead in Christ are experiencing right now? Where did that image come from? Has this lesson significantly changed or enriched it? What is the most surprising or most moving thing you encountered in the lesson's description of the present heaven?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Revelation 4:1–11 carefully. Identify every element of the heavenly scene: the throne, the One upon it, the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, the sea of glass, the seven torches of fire. What is each element's role in the scene? What do the elders do in verses 9–11, and what does the casting of the crowns communicate about the character of heavenly worship? What specific words of praise do they offer, and what is the ground they name for God's worthiness?
- Read Revelation 5:1–14. What is the problem presented in verses 1–4, and how is it resolved? What are the three titles used for Christ in verse 5 ("Lion of the tribe of Judah," "Root of David"), and what does each convey? What does John actually see in verse 6, and what is the significance of the contrast between the announced lion and the seen lamb? What is the content of the new song in verses 9–10, and what does the scope of the redemption it describes ("from every tribe and tongue and people and nation") tell us about the character of the present heaven's community?
- Read Revelation 7:9–17. Who is the great multitude, and where do they come from (vv. 9, 13–14)? What are they doing (vv. 9–10, 15)? What does the phrase "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" communicate about how they arrived at their present condition? List every specific promise made about the conditions of their existence in verses 15–17. Which of these promises is most specifically pastoral for the bereaved?
- Read Hebrews 12:22–24. List every member of the assembly that the author says the congregation has "come to." What is the significance of the present-tense framing ("you have come" rather than "you will come")? What does the phrase "spirits of the righteous made perfect" mean in context, given the argument of Hebrews 11:39–40? What does the "sprinkled blood that speaks better than the blood of Abel" add to the picture of the present heaven's community?
- Read John 14:2–3. What promise does Jesus make about the present heaven ("I go to prepare a place for you"), and what promise does He make about the final state ("I will come again and receive you to Myself")? How does the two-part structure of this promise reflect the two-stage eschatological framework of the present heaven and the new creation? What is the defining characteristic of the place Jesus has prepared, according to verse 3?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the present heaven is real, an actual place where Christ dwells in His glorified resurrection body. Why does the reality and spatial character of the present heaven matter theologically? What would be lost if the present heaven were understood as merely a spiritual condition rather than a real place?

- The lesson distinguishes carefully between the present heaven (the intermediate state) and the eternal state (the new creation after the resurrection). Why does this distinction matter? What specific theological errors does it prevent? And how does keeping this distinction clear actually strengthen the resurrection hope rather than diminishing the comfort the intermediate state provides?
- The lesson describes the great multitude of Revelation 7 as composed of those who have "come out of the great tribulation", and argues on amillennial grounds that this refers to the full company of the redeemed from the entire inter-advent period, not a specific future seven-year tribulation. What exegetical and theological arguments support this reading? How does it change the pastoral application of the passage compared to the dispensational alternative?
- The lesson argues that Hebrews 12:22–24's present-tense description of access to the heavenly assembly has profound implications for the church's Sunday worship. Do you find this argument persuasive? What specific aspects of congregational worship would be transformed if the congregation genuinely believed it was participating in the ongoing worship of the throne room?
- The lesson closes with the application for mission: the great multitude of Revelation 7:9 is not yet complete, and the mission of the church is the process by which it is being filled out. How does the vision of the present heaven as the destination of those who respond to the gospel shape the church's understanding of evangelism and cross-cultural mission? What would change in a congregation's missionary engagement if every member genuinely believed that every person who trusts the Lamb gets their robe washed white and their name added to the multitude before the throne?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- This lesson has provided a specific, biblically grounded description of what the dead in Christ are currently experiencing. How does this description change the way you would speak to someone who has just lost a believing loved one? What specific language, what specific Scripture passages, and what specific images from this lesson would you use to bring the comfort of the present heaven to a specific grief situation you are currently aware of?
- Unit 2 is now complete. Lessons 4, 5, and 6 together provide a comprehensive biblical theology of death, the intermediate state, and the present heaven. What is the single most important thing this unit has given you that you did not have before? And how will you use it, in your personal devotion, in your pastoral relationships, or in your congregational life, in the coming weeks?
- The distinction between the present heaven and the final heaven protects the resurrection hope from being swallowed by the intermediate-state hope. But most popular Christian thinking and popular funeral sermons focus almost entirely on the intermediate state ("They are in a better place") without reaching forward to the resurrection ("And they will be raised in glory when He returns"). How can you begin to speak and teach in a way that honors both, that provides the specific, present comfort of the intermediate state and the forward-looking, resurrection-shaped hope of the final state?
- As Unit 3 begins, The Kingdom of God: Already and Not Yet, how do the three lessons of Unit 2 prepare us for the next movement of the eschatological study? In what ways does the doctrine of the present heaven connect to the already/not yet framework that Unit 3 will develop? What questions does the transition from individual eschatology to cosmic eschatology raise for you that you are bringing into the next unit?

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading Revelation 5:11–13 aloud, slowly, as though you are hearing the sound: "The number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.'" Pause. This is the sound of the present heaven, the sound that is filling the throne room right now, while this congregation gathers in this room. The departed saints we love are in the middle of that sound. They are adding their voices to it. And the congregation that gathers here is, through the Spirit, adding its voice too. Pray that the congregation would have ears to hear it.

Pray for the congregation's worship, specifically, that it would become more genuinely heavenly in its character. Pray that the members of this congregation would arrive on the Lord's Day with an awareness of where they are gathering and whose presence they are entering. Pray that the singing would become less self-referential and more genuinely doxological, addressed to the Lamb who is worthy, not to the congregation's own emotional experience. Pray that the preaching would open the Word in a way that creates genuine access to the Christ who is at the center of the heavenly assembly. And pray that the Lord's Supper would be received with the specific, eschatological awareness that it proclaims His death until He comes, pointing backward to the cross and forward to the return, situating the congregation in the middle of the story that the throne room has already entered its final chapter.

Pray for those in the congregation who are grieving, and name the present heaven specifically in that prayer. Pray that they would be able, by the Spirit's illumination, to see their deceased loved one not merely as gone but as arrived, arrived in the throne room, standing before the Lamb, clothed in white, every tear wiped away, at rest from their labors, guided to springs of living water. Pray that this specific, textually grounded vision of where their beloved has gone would not remain an intellectual comfort but would descend into the specific, raw ache of grief and begin to transform it. Pray that the doctrine of the present heaven would do what doctrine is designed to do: form the soul in the image of the hope it proclaims.

Pray for the mission of the church in light of the great multitude of Revelation 7:9. Pray for the specific mission commitments and partnerships of this congregation, for the missionaries you support, for the unreached people groups who have no access to the gospel, for the communities in East Texas where the gospel has not yet fully penetrated. Pray with the vision of the great multitude before you: every person who trusts the Lamb will be in that crowd. Their robe will be washed white. Their name will be added. The throne room will receive them. Ask God to use this congregation as an instrument of the gathering that Revelation 7 depicts, to make disciples of all nations until the great multitude stands complete before the throne.

Close with the words of Psalm 16:11, spoken in unison as a congregation: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." Let that verse be the summary of everything Unit 2 has taught about death, the intermediate state, and the present heaven. The presence of God in Christ is fullness of joy. The right hand of the Father is where Christ is seated. The pleasures at that right hand are forever. The dead in Christ are there now. We will be there at death. And at the resurrection, we will be there in the fullness that the present heaven can only partially provide. Soli Deo Gloria.

> *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."*
>
> **Revelation 5:12, NASB 1995**

Key Texts: *Revelation 4–5; 6:9–11; 7:9–17; Hebrews 12:1, 22–24; Psalm 16:11; John 14:2–3; Philippians 1:23*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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