

6

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



*What do you like best about
a fresh start?*

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

One day we will fully experience who God created us to be.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Over the course of my adult life, I've owned five houses. Each move to another house represented a change in our lives: a shift in ministry or relocation to a new city. With each move, my family started fresh with schools, church families, and even finding the best Mexican food in town. While it was sad to leave a house we liked and say goodbye to good friends, we also experienced the thrill of a new chapter in our lives.

Each new chapter, though, was not without its challenges. Health issues arose. Key relationships went through unexpected changes. Friends and family died. Each new place we lived included an ebb and flow to life that wasn't always idyllic.

I am thankful this world is not my real home. The closing chapters of the Book of Revelation show us that God provides a permanent home where He will live with us forever. The far-from-idyllic ebb and flow of life on earth will be absent—as will be the presence of sin and death. Our final, new home will be perfect.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Revelation 21:1-3

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. ³ Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.

My wife and I are big fans of just about any TV program that shows old homes being remodeled. It’s fascinating to watch a designer inspect a dilapidated home and see its potential, completely redesign and remodel it, and then present the updated version to the new homeowner.

The renovated “new” homes we see on television won’t even begin to compare to the new home believers will experience one day. In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John was given a vision of what the end times will be like. Revelation 21 opens with a picture of this perfect, future reality. The Creator of the universe is an expert at making things new, and one day we will see the extent of His work in “making everything new” (v. 5).

- ▶ **A new heaven and a new earth.** The media is full of stories about murder, rape, theft, debauchery, and more. It seems like the world is spinning out of control. But a day is coming when the evil and devastation humanity has brought on this earth no longer will be a part of God’s good creation. The apostle Peter wrote about the destruction of the heavens and earth by a great fire. (See 2 Pet. 3:10-13.) A great noise will be heard, the elements will melt and dissolve away, but as John saw in his vision, a new heaven and a new earth will emerge after this purging and cleansing.

What are some of the most interesting ideas you’ve heard about heaven?

QUESTION #2

- ▶ **No more sea.** A lot of us enjoy looking out at the massive ocean, but the sea also represents separation. When John had this vision, he had been exiled to the island of Patmos, separated from his church in Ephesus by the Aegean Sea. Some scholars believe the phrase “the sea was no more” (Rev. 21:1) means that in the future new world, God’s people will no longer be separated from one another or from the Lord.
- ▶ **The new Jerusalem.** The metaphor of a bride and groom portrays the arrival of the new city of Jerusalem. It will be the dwelling place of God and His people once it descends. The word “adorned” in verse 2 (the Greek word *kosmeo*, from which we get our English word “cosmetics”) reminds us that our new home will awe us much like a bride’s beauty awes her groom. It will be the perfect new home for God’s people.
- ▶ **A new way of life.** This is the best news of all. God will now dwell with us. God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden; the Holy Spirit came upon people temporarily throughout the Old Testament; and He came to permanently indwell believers in the New Testament. But in our future home, we will experience the presence of God like never before. “God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them.”

The glories of heaven will be truly that—glorious!—but the truly glorious part of it all will be the presence of God Himself. His presence is what makes heaven—well, heaven.

Revelation 21:4-5

⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. ⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

How can these promises for the future provide comfort for the present?

QUESTION #3



Tears of grief are something we've all experienced in our lifetimes. I remember well the Monday my mother called and told me my grandfather had just died. On another Monday, my sister called and told me our father had passed away of a heart attack. You surely can recall similar circumstances: the passing of a friend or the death of a parent, a child, or a spouse. Sadness and tears are simply a part of human existence—for now.

Thankfully, sadness will end one day. "Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more." Let that sink in. No more death. No more grief. No more crying. No more pain. The thought of this is overwhelming.

Sin entered our world in the garden of Eden. But thankfully, the Lord is going to restore His children. When we repent and turn to Him in faith, He removes the penalty and consequence of our sin, which brings us into a relationship with Him. And in heaven, we will be fully in His presence and know the joy His presence brings.

A day is coming when God promises to wipe away our tears and bring an end to all our sadness and grief. The promise of an end to our pain and suffering makes me say, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Revelation 21:6-8

⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. ⁸ But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

How do these promises reflect God's character?

QUESTION #4

You and I are one heartbeat away from heaven or hell. That's a sobering thought. In the blink of an eye, we could be standing before God to give an account of our lives. Consider God's promises in this passage:

- ▶ **God freely gives salvation to those who ask.** "I will freely give to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life." Only God Himself can quench the spiritual thirst we feel. God does not charge for the gift of water from the fountain of life. Christ has already paid the price on the cross.
- ▶ **Those who are saved belong to God's family.** "The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son." God does not simply do something for us; He brings us into a relationship with Him. God the Father has one Son, Jesus (see John 3:16), but He has many adopted children. (See Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4-7.) As a child of the King, any adopted son or daughter is an heir and joint-heir with Jesus.
- ▶ **The unrepentant will not live in heaven.** Some people will be excluded from heaven. Verse 8 includes a list of people who will not inherit the kingdom, and the list is representative, not exhaustive. One set of people will have responded to the gospel and God's offer of grace. The other group will have chosen to continue in their sin. Their future is an eternity without God.

The unrepentant person will die twice. First, they will experience a physical death like all of us will. This is the first death, the one we will all experience unless Jesus returns. The second death is much more serious: it will be a spiritual death in which a person is separated from God forever. Yet, faith and trust changes all that. When we turn to Christ, the reality of the second death is gone. Christ took that death for us, so that we could share life with Him. In heaven. Forever.

What can we say for certain about eternity based on this passage?

QUESTION #5

LOOKING AHEAD

Check one of these statements about heaven that is especially meaningful for you:

- We will be with God forever.
- We will see saved loved ones who have already died.
- We will never experience pain or death again.
- We will have new bodies without current handicaps or limitations.

Write a short poem or sketch a drawing that represents what you are looking forward to about heaven. Thank the Lord for those future blessings as well as the present ones.

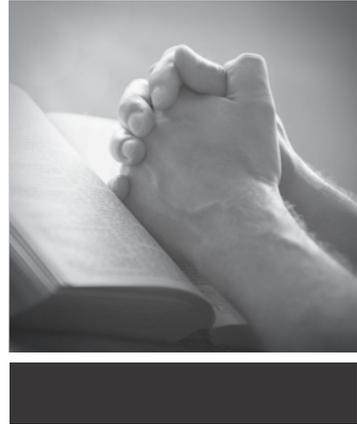
"I would not give one moment of heaven for all the joy and riches of the world, even if it lasted for thousands and thousands of years."

— MARTIN LUTHER

LIVE IT OUT

A day is coming when we will experience all God created us to be. We'll live in a sinless, perfect place with God as our Father. How will that truth impact your life this week?

- ▶ **Pray a prayer of thanksgiving.** If you are a believer, take a moment to thank the Lord for placing you in His “forever family.” Thank Him for the grace that saved you.
- ▶ **Pray a prayer of salvation.** If you are unsure if you are going to heaven, talk to your group leader or check out the inside front cover of this book. God desires to make things “new” in your life through His forgiveness and grace.
- ▶ **Share Christ with a friend or family member.** Set a time to share the gospel with someone you believe is far from God. Help them understand that Jesus loves them, died for them, and is willing to save them from the penalty of sin.



Of the five houses I've lived in, the one I currently reside in is my favorite, by far. But I will gladly give it up when God brings me into my new, permanent home with Him.

My thoughts



A NIGHT AT SEA

BY LANDON DICKERSON

“Growing up, I could never really remember telling my parents that I loved them; I wanted to tell them that then.”

Those were the thoughts that John Mitchell had as he held onto a bucket, floating in the middle of a Sarasota, Florida harbor, miles out from land. That is not where John thought he would be spending the night when he woke up that Sunday morning. A recent draft pick by the Boston Red Sox in 1983, Mitchell was sent down to Florida for awhile. On one of the team’s days off, Mitchell and two of his teammates—Anthony (Tony) Latham and Scott Skripko—were to meet Mark Zastrowny, a friend who lived in the area and would

take them shark fishing in the Charlotte Bay harbor. That evening, a catastrophe changed the lives of Mitchell and his companions.

Mitchell's story doesn't begin with a catastrophe, though. Being a churchgoer his entire life, he was familiar with the teachings of the Bible and what it means to be a Christian. "I grew up going to church. It wasn't an option in our family. We didn't have a choice. Even when we went out of town on vacation, we would have to go to church somewhere," Mitchell said. He was very active in his youth group. However, Mitchell did not consider himself saved. Church was just a religion to him, and outside of the church, Mitchell did not live a lifestyle that embraced the like-mindedness of Christ.

When Mitchell was sent to the Florida Instructional League, everything changed for him. "On Tuesday nights, the Baseball Chapel would have a Bible study that was a little more in-depth and would last a little longer," Mitchell explained. He and a few of his teammates went to the Bible studies. "Because of my upbringing, I just thought that I was supposed to go. It was just something you did." A particular night was a bit different from the others. "One Tuesday night, we went, and I knew I needed a Savior. The pastor was preaching about what salvation means, and I said yes to Jesus." Just a week before Mitchell's salvation, his teammate Tony Latham was saved at the same Bible study.

The next week, he found himself in the middle of a harbor with teammates Latham and Skripko and the boat owner, Zastrowny, a few miles out from the coast. The boat they were in was not in good condition and was holding water from a small leak. After having no success at fishing, they decided to turn back to land. "A hat blew off one of the guy's heads, and we rushed over to get it," Mitchell recalled. With all of the guys on one side of the boat, the water it was holding rushed to the same side, and the boat started to sink.

Sadly, Tony Latham could not swim and drowned when the boat sank completely, despite the other men's desperate efforts to help him. Mayhem among the remaining three ensued. Mitchell found a bucket, turned it upside down to trap the air, and floated. Skripko and Zastrowny grabbed two coolers and used those as floatation devices. "The boat owner told us not to waste our energy because the current was too strong. We just had to stay afloat and hope somebody would come by and see us."



It was evening, and there were not many people out that day because of the rough water, and it was starting to get dark. After a failed attempt to climb a wooden post marker nearby, Mitchell watched helplessly as the three men drifted apart. Before long, he was floating in the ocean alone. “The first thing that went through my mind was, *Well, we were shark fishing. Are there sharks around here?* Then I started wondering if I would ever see my mother and father again,” he said. Mitchell struggled with regret for not expressing his love for his parents. “I think I kind of took them for granted.” After this, he started to pray and asked God to deliver him, with a promise that he would give his life entirely over to God.

The next day was Monday, and there were not a lot of people out on boats during the morning hours. “I remember seeing one boat and hollering for it, but it was too far away,” Mitchell said. All morning, the men drifted until two fishermen rescued Skripko around noon, and he was able to tell them someone else may still be in the water.

“One Tuesday night, we went [to the Bible study], and I knew I needed a Savior.”

“We had been out in the water about 20 hours. I began to hallucinate. I was dehydrated, and hypothermia had set in.” Mitchell finally let go of the bucket and was swimming. “After letting go . . . , the only thing I remember is being rescued.” Later, Mitchell learned that Zastrowny had also drowned during the night.

Mitchell knew well that the Lord had spared him. After being rescued, Mitchell returned to pitch for the Red Sox farm system and then in the major leagues for the Mets (1986-1989) and the Orioles (1990). Now married with four children, one who was named after his fallen teammate, Mitchell said the events of that night are never too far from his thoughts. Knowing that Latham had given his life to the Lord, even if only two weeks prior to his drowning, has brought Mitchell comfort and a new perspective. A member of New Vision Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Mitchell teaches a boys Bible study and shares the good news of Jesus on baseball mission trips to the Dominican Republic. Remembering his promise to God, Mitchell continues to share how Jesus rescued his soul and spared him that night at sea.

Landon Dickerson is a member of ClearView Baptist Church in Franklin, Tennessee, and serves as a freelance writer and editor.