

## **Introduction**

Listen to the words of the eccentric artist Salvador Dali, **"Have no fear of perfection, you'll never reach it."** Dali was wrong about a lot of things but he was right about that. As I said last week, you and I will never know or experience perfection in the **"first heaven and earth,"** our universe now. But according to our text, we will in the **"new heaven and earth,"** the eternal universe we call **"heaven."** Imperfection won't exist there; only perfection. Last week, I explained its perfections of environment, persons, and relationships. Today, I'm going to explain two more perfections. I'll then discuss living in light of that.

## **Perfection of Life – Absence of the Negative**

The fourth perfection, in verse 4, is perfection of life.

Look at the little catalogue of terms there: tears, mourning, crying, and pain. Those terms represent all negative thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Consider how many negative thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations you've had in your life on earth. It's hundreds of thousands. Now consider how many you'll have in your unending life in heaven. It's zero, none.

I'm going to show you a series of facial expressions. After each, identify the feeling that forms it: anger, fear, depression, embarrassment, and grief. You and I will never have or observe any of those facial expressions in heaven. Why? It's because neither we nor anyone else will ever have any of the feelings that form them.

That illustrates an astonishing fact about heavenly life. We'll not experience even one negative thought, feeling, or bodily sensation in it.

Verse 1 reveals a related insight. In heaven, **"there is no longer any sea."** Some commentators interpret that statement literally. Others interpret it figuratively, **"sea"** representing **"evil"** as it does elsewhere in the Bible and in other apocalyptic literature. Whichever view we hold though, everyone in the know agrees about this. Not one person will

commit even one sin in heaven. Not one lie, for instance, will ever be told there. Evil of any kind and to any degree won't exist there.

Verse 3 mentions something else that won't exist – death. The statistics on death in our world are quite impressive. One out of one people die. In heaven, zero out of one people die. No living thing whether it's plant, animal, or human being will ever cease living. Every living thing will continue living forever.

Now, pulling verses 1, 3, and 4 together unveils one aspect of heavenly life. It's absolutely flawless. Not one thing that's negative or diminishing will ever occur or be experienced there.

There's another aspect, in verse 6, that's just as exciting. John uses a vivid metaphor to explain it. The strongest of all bodily cravings is thirst. The deepest of all bodily satisfactions, therefore, is quenching that thirst. According to verse 6, heavenly life will be like that. All our deepest spiritual, psychological, and bodily longings, in other words, will be *always* and *utterly* fulfilled.

Christian evangelical leader Michael Bickle wrote a book titled *The Seven Longings of the Human Heart*. They are the longing to be enjoyed by God, the longing for fascination, the longing for beauty, the longing for greatness, the longing for intimacy without shame, the longing to be wholehearted, and the longing to make a deep and lasting impact. Those longings of ours and all longings, from the smallest to the biggest, will be *always* and *utterly* fulfilled in heaven.

Verse 5 reveals a component of that. Referring to the new universe, heaven, God says, "**I am making all things new.**" Notice that's it's in a present and continuing tense. The new universe will continually be formed and filled, alluding to the pattern of Genesis 1. Who will form and fill it? 22:5 tells us. It's God in partnership with the members of His eternal community. That verse pictures His ultimate purpose for them. It's to "**reign (with Him) forever and ever.**" "**Reign**" means they'll pervade the entirety of the new universe and continually form and fill it. More particularly, God will partner with you and me, as

individuals, in forming and filling that part of it over which He gives us authority. Dallas Willard described it with these stirring words. We will **“be absorbed in a tremendously creative team effort, with unimaginably splendid leadership (God’s) on an inconceivably vast plane of activity with ever more comprehensive cycles of productivity and enjoyment.”** All I can say is **“Wow!”**

That ultimate destiny of ours is clearly linked with two of our most fervent longings – for greatness and to make a deep and lasting impact. They will, believe me, be always and utterly fulfilled. But it isn’t just those two longings of ours. It’s each and every one from the shallowest to the deepest. They’ll be *always* and *utterly* fulfilled.

Those then are the two defining aspects of heavenly life. One is absolute flawlessness – nothing negative and diminishing. The other is absolute completeness – everything positive and fulfilling. Heavenly life, in other words, will be perfect.

### **Perfection of Relationship with God**

That brings us to the most significant perfection of heaven. It’s the one in fact that makes heaven, heaven. According to verse 3, **“He (God) will dwell among them,”** and **“God Himself will be among them.”** Those declarations teach us that God will be a member of the eternal community He creates, and its most glorious inhabitant.

Another declaration in verse 3 expands on that. It’s that, **“the tabernacle of God is among them.”** The word **“tabernacle”** in combination with the word **“dwell”** references the **“the Shekinah glory”** or manifest presence of God in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and temple. God can and does manifest His presence to us. But because of our bodily limitations, He must restrict the degree to which He does so.

Dwight L. Moody told about an experience of God’s manifest presence that illustrates what I mean: **“I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York – oh what a day! I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it.**

**It is almost too sacred an experience to name. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.**" As he explained later, he asked God to **"stay His hand"** because he felt as if he was going to be crushed and killed by His presence, which he probably would have.

Moody's experience demonstrates that our earthly bodies exceedingly limit us in experiencing God's presence and love. But our resurrected bodies, flawless and complete as I explained last week, won't. If Moody had been in his resurrected body that day, he would not have had to ask God to **"stay His hand."**

My point is that our relationship with God will be dramatically enhanced in heaven. We'll experience routinely and deeply what Moody did only temporarily and superficially that day in New York. Our experience of His presence and love will be more fulfilling than we can begin to imagine. The word that comes closest to describing it is **"bliss."** It'll be so blissful in fact that it's what makes heaven, heaven.

So there you have it, the perfection of heaven. It's perfection of environment, persons, relationships with others, life, and relationship with God. I'd sum up the overall result of that this way. Think of the most extraordinary moment you've ever had on earth. The most ordinary moment in heaven will make that one moment pale in comparison

### **Live in Light of Heaven**

That's the startling truth and we need to live in light of it. One author explains it this way: **"Our future must make sense to us. It must be something we can now plan or make decisions in terms of, with clarity and joyful anticipation. In this way our future can be incorporated into our life now and our life now can be incorporated into our future."** That's generally how we live in light of our perfect future in heaven. More particularly, we do four things.

First, understand our perfect future. The Bible gives us a great deal of information about it. Learn the details of that information. Then

apply good logic to those details to infer other details. I've done that and have given you just a few of the details I've learned these past two Sundays. There are many more. You'll find those on our church's website in the *Life after Life* study under the *Disciples 'R' Us* tab. That study will assist you in understanding the perfect future God has for you.

We do a second thing to live in light of our perfect future. Fix our minds on it. Secular people often accuse Christians of being so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good. The fact is though that most professing Christians aren't all that heavenly-minded. For one thing, they've never bothered to learn everything they can about it. For another thing, they rarely think about what they have learned. If you're like most professing Christians, you go entire days without seriously thinking about it. But that needs to change. We should bring it before our minds whenever we can.

My skin is thin now and easily bruised, but won't bruise at all in heaven. I think about that every time it bruises. Or according to John 14:2, Jesus is preparing a place for me in heaven over which to reign. I think about that every time I look up into the stars. Let's be heavenly-minded. It excites, motivates, and strengthens us when we are.

There's a third thing we do to live in light of our perfect future. Perceive and interpret day-to-day activities and events in terms of it. We get promoted. We get fired. We get cancer. We marry the person of our dreams. We fail. Nothing we experience and do occurs in a vacuum. It always occurs in the larger context of our perfect future instead. So we take that future into account as we experience and do it.

Many faithful Christians, for instance, are distressed about how their lives have turned out. Their upset is often rooted in how they're experiencing aging. They take it to mean they have no future. It's also often rooted in their failure to achieve what they hoped. They question what they've done wrong or whether God has really been with them. Their problem is that they view aging and failure in isolation. They should view them in the larger context of their perfect future instead.

They'll grasp this if they do. Coming to the end of their present life is of little significance. What is of significance is that their life lies before them. The best is yet to be and I mean that literally.

That shows us what we need to do. Perceive and interpret day-to-day activities and events in terms of our perfect future.

We live in light of our perfect future by doing a fourth thing. Grow in Jesus. A man with a fatal cancer once told me, "**You and I are really in the same boat. We're both dying.**" We're all dying. People say that, but it isn't so. I don't about you, but I'm not dying, I'm growing.

If you and I are disciples or friends of Jesus, we aren't *going to be* in eternity. We *now are* in eternity. Remember the central message of Jesus, "**The kingdom of the heavens is at hand.**" We can access the presence and powers of the age to come, heaven, right now in day-to-day life. And if we do that, we're continually growing not dying. By "**growing,**" I mean we're becoming increasingly eternal in our nature. We're becoming more and more of a person who is at home in heaven.

So, access Jesus and His eternal kingdom at hand. Arrange our life around engaging Him and it through the activities of mind and body I've mentioned and explained before. Our spiritual substance will grow richer and deeper as we do. The older we get the more noticeably glorious and eternal our person and life will become. The result is that when we die, heaven will be the suitable place for us to be.

## **Conclusion**

The renowned Puritan preacher Jonathon Edwards spoke often of heaven. His words are an apt conclusion to this two-part sermon I've preached. They sum up well to what the realities of Revelation 21 call us. Referring to our future life in heaven, he declared, "**Why should we labor or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness.**" What is that proper end and true happiness? You now know. It's perfection!