



The Prophet: Proclaiming How Things Really Are

- What you have done in the past
- Has brought you to this place.
- Therefore, be aware of what is about to happen and repent and draw close to God.
- In other words: this is how things really stand, the way things really are.

The Prophet

"The prophet was above all 'a man of the word': he spoke under the inspiration of the 'Holy Spirit' (Acts 21:11), fulfilling an important role in the community to edify, encourage and proclaim the future, thereby witnessing to the abiding action of the Risen One." *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, III:321

The Story of God's Mission

- We began the story with the Teacher of Theology and God's mission into the world:
 - He is perfect love and draws humanity into perfect love
 - The Triune God exists in perfect relationship and draws humanity into that relationship.
 - And he chooses to use us!
- Now in this talk we will consider the end of that story

Along the Way . . .

- The Evangelist: taking God's mission into the world
 - Making God's name and mission known among all the nations of the world
 - Across cultures
 - In the face of doubt and opposition
 - And in difficult ethical situations
- The Pastor: continuing God's mission among God's people
 - Nurturing growth into the likeness of God
 - Helping people to see God in difficult times
 - Helping to keep all of this work moving forward

But Where is All This Going?

- What is the END? The END end.
 - Not the tribulation or the millennial reign
 - Not a rapture or the antichrist
- Creation's final destiny

Basic Outline of THE END

- “End Times”: all of the stuff we normally talk about
- Judgment
 - “Heaven” (we’ll focus on this)
 - “Hell” (one slide on this, but not because it is unimportant)
- Eternity

The Urgency of Hell

- There is a judgment coming.
- There are two ways.
- The nature of hell is obscure in the Bible.
- But it is real, and really horrible.
- So we need to warn.
- Now on to the other destination . . .

Some Things We Can All Agree On

- Luther: “We know no more about eternal life than children in the womb of their mother know about the world they are about to enter.” (Quoted in *Four Views on Heaven*, Introduction)
- “when it comes to eschatology, the Christian Scriptures teach the three Rs: the Return of Christ, the Resurrection of the body, and the Restoration of all things.” (Michael Wittmer, *Four Views*, Introduction)
- Craig Keener, interview on End Times: Jesus is returning, be ready.

Two Main Perspectives in Church History

- “Theocentric”: Heaven, whatever and wherever it is, is all about God
- “Anthropocentric”: Heaven—and the New Earth?—includes a life that looks something like the current age
- McDannell and Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 353

Theocentric

- Worship: Endless, uninterrupted worship of God (*Rev. 21-22*)
 - May include growth in understanding (*1 Cor. 13:12*)
 - May include growth in becoming more like God (*1 Cor. 15:49*)
- Glorification (or Theosis): unite with God, becoming like him, though not ever becoming him (*John 17:21-23; 2 Peter 1:4*)
- The Beatific Vision: we “see” God, beholding his perfect goodness and beauty (*Matthew 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12*)

The Beatific Vision

Historically dominant, especially among writers and artists and pastors

Psa 27:4 One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

“To ‘see the face of God’ is to have a privileged, intimate relationship with God—seeing God ‘as God actually is’ (1 John 3:2), rather than having to know God indirectly, through images and shadows. Now we see God ‘as through a glass darkly;’ but we shall finally see God face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).” McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven*, 181

The Beatific Vision

•John Donne, English poet and cleric, 1572-1631: *"No man ever saw God and lived. And yet, I shall not live till I see God; and when I have seen him, I shall never die."* (Quoted in McGrath, 184)

Anthropocentric

- Creation is good, so the goodness of creation will be restored (*Genesis 1; Romans 8:19-23; 2 Peter 3:13*)
- New Heaven and New Earth are important (*Rev. 21-22*)
- We will live something like we live today. Major questions:
 - Will we know each other?
 - What will we look like?
 - Will we eat and drink?
 - Will we do work?
- Varying rewards and responsibilities

Application

After encouraging the Corinthians with the promise of the Resurrection, Paul wrote:

1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

J. Richard Middleton: "ethics is lived eschatology" (*Four Views, "A New Earth Perspective"*)

Application

Michael Allen: *"Christian or religious sacrifice will invariably flag to the extent that eschatological expectations are ambiguous or unsettled. So the gospel word that with Jesus Christ the end of all things is at hand is no small matter. The presence of the kingdom, the reign of Christ from heaven's throne on high, and his promised return; each of these realities offers a settled or sure hope. . . ."We not only need his solution to our problems but also are aware that our deepest problem is our lack of awareness of our ultimate problem. We need him, much more than we understand or appreciate."* (*Four Views, "A Heaven on Earth Perspective"*)

Application

- Encouragement to study and teach and preach:
 - Thrilling to ponder
 - Encouraging: *1Th 4:16-18 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort/encourage one another with these words.*
- And warn

Application

- As Christians, this is what gives everything we've talked about purpose and meaning.
- As ministers, we should be reminding ourselves often of these truths.
- We should be preaching this often, reminding our congregations that Eternity awaits, in all of its mysterious glory!

The End of the Story

- Luke started us off with God's mission into the world, which is to draw us into the Trinity's relationship of love.
- In this talk we see the End of that story: those who are in Jesus will be united with him in glorious love, however that may look.

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Honorable Mentions

- This is a book, written by one of the *Four Views* authors, that seems to be gaining some traction: J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.
- A podcast overview of Middleton's book: <https://onscript.study/podcast/j-richard-middleton-a-new-heaven-and-a-new-earth/>
- N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope* has some traction among ACs.
- A book by a popular author among conservative evangelicals: Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*.

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