

“Will you be in Paradise, or...”. Rev 21:1-4, 27

“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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. ... But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This weekend we have the Speak Lord conference on Christian hope, I thought we too can reflect on our ultimate hope. On the New Creation as John the apostle writes about it in the Book of Revelation!

New Heavens and New Earth! Wow! Glorious, majestic depiction of what the Triune God has prepared for those who love Him. But, before we begin to ponder what He has prepared for His beloved, first we need to acknowledge the obvious.

Not everyone is going to this New Heaven and New Earth. Not at all! Some will enter eternal life, and some will enter eternal punishment. It will be no one else, but the Risen Jesus, who on the Last Day says these words: **“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** (Matt 25:41)

How do you find this message? Unpleasant, difficult to fathom? True. We try to shy away from talking about it. Hell... Yes, it is uncomfortable. And, by the way, there is only one person in the whole New Testament, who does most of the speaking about hell and about this eternal punishment. Can you guess who it is?

The One who made us, the One who redeemed us, not with silver or gold, but with His innocent sufferings and death. And if there is someone who doesn’t want anyone to go to hell, it is Jesus, the Son of God.

Let’s try to see this issue from His perspective. In popular culture you can often encounter this view where heaven and hell are just two destinations – one more enjoyable, the other not so, and then there is this deity, who somewhat arbitrarily decides where you will spend your eternity.

If that’s a mental picture of what happens after this life is over, then surely, a certain question arises – what kind of God would be so malevolent as to deny reasonably good people, as most believe we are, the pleasures of heaven and would instead send them to hell to suffer and be tormented. Fu! Fu!

But that picture is incorrect! Surely the New Heaven and New Earth will be real locations, but the proper question is not about *where* you want to spend eternity, but *with whom*? Not where, but with whom?

With the Triune God or without Him. With the Triune God or with all the ungodly people who reject Him. That's the choice. See, we can summarize it saying – it is not so much about place; it is about relationships!

Remember, the Triune God created us to live in a trusting and joyful relationship with Him. To receive all the blessings from Him. Then the greatest tragedy took place, when our first parents severed those live-giving relationships with their Creator.

From that day onwards, we all are born with cold hearts, not only not knowing true God, but not wanting to know Him, we reject Him, we deny His existence, we rebel against Him, we mock Him and His people, we spend our lives bathing in His generous grace and repaying with our ingratitude, hating and despising Him.

On that day, in the beginning, in the garden, remember! Who came looking for our parents? Yes, the Son of God! And He gave them the promise that He Himself will restore what was broken. Even at the highest cost imaginable.

Since that day the Triune God has not stopped calling us back to Himself, sending His Spirit to us. He wants to restore our relationships. He never gives up on us, He wants to be our God. And He wants you to know Him intimately as your God.

Then, in the fullness of time, the Son of God came to fulfill that ancient promise. And how did He do that? **He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” (Phil 2:7-8)

He came to rescue us. He came to rescue you! Paying the highest price. His own sufferings and death. But, what did He come to rescue us from? What do you think? Not from bad neighbours... no! From eternal separation, from us forever being ...

“Away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.” (2 Thes 1:9) From us being **“throw into the fiery furnace”** and **“into the outer darkness”** ... where **“their worm shall not die”**, and where **“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** (Mat 13:42, 8:12) That is Jesus speaking, by the way!

See, if there is someone who doesn't want anyone to end that way, it is Jesus, it is the Triune God, as He says repeatedly: **“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”** (Ezekiel 33:11) This is why He sends His messengers to the ends of the earth.

This is why He promises that He Himself will travel with them. What more could He do? He does not force us. He wants us to respond to His love freely, as we learn what He has done for us. He even leaves the last word to us.

Yes, we have that frightening power to reject His invitation. “Will you come to me? Do you want to be with me?” And so many reply with: “No! Not interested! I am fine without you. Go away! Keep out of my life!”

Those who don't want to be with God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, their wish will be granted. Also notice this, this is a significant detail. As we can gather from the Scripture, among those who choose to be separated from God, there will be no regret, no cries for mercy, no pleas for forgiveness. They will be heading where they chose to. They won't change their mind.

This is a time of grace! Unless we recognize our sinful condition, unless we repent and believe in the Gospel, unless we accept God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life, we won't make it, we will not walk through the narrow gate.

These are the choices we make in this life, and too often we take them too lightly. This is why our calling to be Jesus' witnesses is so, so important, we need to take it seriously. What we say to people in our lives may mean for someone the difference between eternal life or death. May the Lord open their hearts and our lips!

Now about our eternal hope. To those who desire to be with the Triune God, whatever imperfect you are, whatever you have done, if only you respond to God's invitation with repentant hearts, to you the Risen Lord Jesus will say: **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [!]**” (Matt 25:34)

Out of curiosity, how often do you think about what this New Creation, this New Earth and New Heavens will look like? For the Holy Spirit urges us: **“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”** (Col 3:2)

What do you think, what will your life be like there? Imagine, if you were moving to another country, to another continent, of course, you would be pondering what it will be like? Can we see some pictures? Videos?

Can we learn about climate, nature, animals and neighbourhood? What will the food taste like? What will and what will not be there? But here we are talking about our eternal abode. Your home. Forever!

Let's do it now, just a little bit! The New Creation!

Yes, it is God the Creator of the Universe who is preparing this new Earth for us. He won't let us down. First human beings were placed in that bountiful garden, filled with beautiful fruit trees, majestic animals and colourful birds, with fertile ground abounding with precious stones and metals, just waiting for us to work and keep it.

Now we are many, multitudes and multitudes of God's saints and our God has prepared for us ... a city. Yes! A city like no other! Built from the most amazing materials, with gardens and forests and rivers.

With places already prepared for each one of God's people! With a place prepared for you! Jesus Himself is taking care of that. All of that for us to dwell there, in the most amazing and most loving community of God's people.

What the first creation allows us to sample, the New Creation will provide for us fully according to God's eternal purpose. The garden was the place where our first parents met God, the Son of God before His incarnation.

The city of God will be the place where God Himself, the Risen Christ will dwell among us, He will be our God and we will be His people. That city, our new abode, won't need the Sun or moon anymore. How come?

Because the glory of the Risen Lord Jesus will fill it with radiant light days and nights. And we will see Him face to face as He is. And as John the apostle writes, we too will be made like Him.

In the beginning humanity was entrusted to have dominion over creation, now we will fulfill this great commission, as we will reign together with our Lord Jesus Christ, exploring and caring for God's creation the way He always intended it. Quite likely that care will extend far beyond what we today know about our Universe.

And, yes! we will have new resurrected bodies! Perfect, strong, beautiful, full of energy, with bright minds, beautiful intellects, amazing characters, with incredibly sharp senses, fit for life in God's presence and fully capable of great responsibilities prepared for us. We will be good, very good!

And you will know it and rejoice in your goodness. Remember, there will be no more shame, no more guilt, no more pain, no more suffering, no more sin, not more sickness, no more death! All of that will be gone.

Everything will exist in perfect harmony. Human beings and animals, birds and sea creatures, fertile ground and everything in creation. We will learn and explore, work and rest, play and laugh, we will feast in the most exquisite banquets, and so on.

We will be together with the One who invented love, joy, laughter... fun, humour, excitement, and so much more. This is why the Holy Spirit says: **"In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."** (Ps 16:11)

Pleasures forevermore... And what a company we will enjoy! Have you thought about it? Whom will we meet? Let me give you a glimpse! We will fellowship with Adam, and Eve and with people from the pre-flood world.

With Noah and Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Rachel and Lea, with Moses and Aaron and Miriam, with Naomi and Ruth, with Samuel and David and Bathsheba, with Isaiah, and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

With Matthew and Mark, Luke and John, Paul and Peter, Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and with all the martyrs, and with greatest theologians, with great scientists, with great musicians, with great poets and comedians.

With great chefs and winemakers. And countless number of others... And you among them. You will know them. They will know you. And Jesus will be among us... This is most certainly true. It is.

This and not less... This promise of the New Creation fills us with certain and joyful hope, with our eternal hope, and this hope allows us to see also our lives here from the perspective of the life that is to come. Can you see it?!

Having this hope, knowing what God has prepared for you, even in the lowest and darkest moments of our life, and we all have them, the Holy Spirit gives you strength to exclaim together with Paul the apostle:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18) “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Cor 4:17)

This is your future and knowing it... also this life looks and feels very different. Much more hopeful. Doesn't it?

Amen.