

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Imagine There's a Heaven

Petar Nenadov

“Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try,” John Lennon sang, “no hell below us, above us only sky.”

The famous song proceeds to imagine a world with no religion to divide or national borders to defend – with the assumption that unity and peace would result.

Though the desire for “the world to be as one” is good, imagining there's a heaven is a much better place to start.

Place of Holy Happiness

If you could imagine heaven, what would it look like?

An ancient Hebrew prophet imagined a place in which a wolf and a lamb dwell together with a child leading them. A place without pain or

destruction, where peace replaces fear, where animals roam without being hunted and children play without interruption (Isaiah 11:6–9).

Another writer helps us to imagine a great city in which each building is covered with precious metals, drinks are on the house, and no one experiences crying, pain, or death again. A place without fatigue or sickness, where celebration replaces sadness, with architecture that takes our breath away and with gates that never close (Revelation 21:1-4, 9-21).

The visions are different – a beautiful countryside and a glorious city – but the reality of uninterrupted pleasure is the same. In these imaginations, it's impossible to imagine heaven's happiness without also imagining its holiness. If heaven is anything less than holy, people would still suffer abuse, doors would still require locks, and animals would still destroy one another.

It wouldn't be so wonderful, would it?

Understanding your future, fellow Christian, begins by imagining a place of gladness and pleasure uninterrupted by evil and sin.

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Not There Yet

Such a place makes it possible to admit a few things.

First, if heaven exists, we're not presently in it. The world we experience is characterised by life and death, love and hate, laughing and crying, dancing and mourning, peace and war (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). Interruptions abound and good things disappear. This is how the world is, and how it will continue to be. No charismatic political leader, new legislation, or generous charitable foundation can finally rid the world of these interruptions.

...our hearts' longing for a place of goodness and uninterrupted pleasure isn't wishful thinking.

Second, if heaven exists, we're not fit for it. If there are people who never grow tired or weak, or always get along with others, we're not among them. If there are people who never have a violent thought or lazy attitude, you've neither met them nor seen them in a mirror. We experience joy, love, and peace, but also guilt, regret, and fear. The interruptions live within us just as much as they live outside of us.

Embracing the gospel awakens us to the truth that we're not fit – physically or spiritually – to experience what our hearts can imagine.

Fit for Glory

The Lord Jesus said:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:1-6)

The gospel literally means “good news.” In these verses, Jesus brings good news to troubled hearts. He affirms the reality of heaven, confirming that our hearts' longing for a place of goodness and uninterrupted pleasure isn't wishful thinking.

Not only did Jesus assure people about the reality of heaven, but he presented himself as the only One who can make us fit for heaven – as the way, the truth, and the life.

Through him, our spiritual poverty can be exchanged for his spiritual riches, our limited and biased perspectives for his truth, our physical limitations for his endless life. Jesus' sinless life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection are the means by which we are made whole, and the world is made well.

How else could Jesus tell Peter not to be troubled immediately after telling him he'd do something he'd regret for the rest of his life (John 13:38)?

We experience the gospel when we entrust ourselves to Jesus as the One who can realise our imaginations – and overcome our limitations – by reconciling us to the God of glory and grace.



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