

Why Are We Here? / Where Are We Going?

Genesis 1-3; Psalm 8; Hebrews 2; Revelation 19-22

Northwest Community Church, November 30, 2025, Todd Havekost

Introduction

We have the ambitious task today of taking on two of the big questions of life.

- First: "Why are we here?"; and
- Second: "Where are we going?"

First: Why are we here, what were we created for? Understanding God's purposes from the beginning in creating humans has far-reaching implications for our lives. Of course, sin threw a monkey wrench into things. But spoiler alert (the first of several today): Despite Satan's tactical victory in Gen. 3, God will overcome that and more. God wins; He will accomplish His purposes.

Sometimes when people come to believe Jesus' promise to freely give eternal life to everyone who believes in Him, they wonder "if I know for certain I have eternal life, that I will be with Jesus for eternity, why doesn't God take me to heaven right now instead of leaving me here, often in difficult circumstances?" Hopefully that answer will become clear as we interact with the "why are we here" question today.

And secondly, where are we going? The New Testament (NT) frequently exhorts us to live for the future. As Col. 3:2 puts it, "**set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**" But it is difficult to have a life profoundly shaped by our future if we don't have a clear image of an intensely desirable destiny.

To address these two fundamental questions, we will look this morning at the first two chapters and the last four chapters of the Bible, with a few stopovers in between (including a Psalm and in Hebrews).

Genesis 1:26-28

First, "why are we here?" Let's pick up the creation account in Genesis 1:26.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:26-28).

These verses tell us man's created purpose.¹

- **"Rule over ..."** (1:26b)
- **"Be fruitful and multiply"** (1:28b)
- **"Fill the earth"** (1:28c)
- **"Subdue it"** (1:28d)
- **"Rule over the fish ... and over the birds ... and over every living thing that moves on the earth"** (1:28e)

Let the cumulative weight of all these verbs sink in. "Rule" and "subdue" both express exercising authority, being "in charge." And "be fruitful ... multiply ... fill the earth" are the means to achieve the population increase required to carry out that dominion.

¹This includes what it means for man to be made in the image of God (Gen 1:26a).

From the very beginning (and let me be as repetitive as God was):

- God put humans in charge of His creation.
- He gave humans authority over that creation.
- He assigned humans responsibility to rule over that creation.

Having unlimited power means God can accomplish anything He chooses to do. He can act unilaterally to whatever extent He wants. But the fact that God gave such far-reaching dominion over creation to humans from the beginning demonstrates something very important about how God chooses to operate that we must not miss. God's standard mode of operation is to accomplish His purposes through His faithful servants. That is one of our primary takeaways today. Once He created humans, God no longer operates by speaking things into existence, nor does He "wave a magic wand" to get things done. Instead, He partners with His servants, He works through us.²

Understanding this eliminates confusion on a myriad of topics. For example, sometimes people get wrapped around the axle on prayer thinking "God can accomplish whatever He wants, why does it matter if I pray?" Of course, God can do anything, but He almost always chooses to do things in partnership with His faithful servants. James 4:3 explicitly applies that truth to prayer, "**you do not have because you do not ask.**"³

Genesis 2-3

The recap of creation in Gen. 2⁴ of gives additional insights into what human rule under God entailed.⁵ **Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it** (2:15). In the beginning, work was not a curse, it was a primary purpose for which man was created. To work the ground was one key aspect of what it meant for man to have dominion.

Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field ... (2:19-20a). In the Ancient Near East culture God bringing the animals to Adam to name them signified God formally handing over dominion of the animals to man.

How was this assignment to rule initially manifested? How do farmers produce crops? They prepare the ground for planting, they plant seeds, they water, they facilitate conditions conducive to growth.⁶ It is not difficult to anticipate how these concepts can be applied outside the realm of agriculture to any activity that produces something of value or creates any type of positive outcome or impact on others.⁷

This dominion bestowed on man involved incredibly broad latitude and responsibility, extending across the entire animal kingdom. But it was not absolute. **The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die"** (2:16-17). Only God the Father has absolute authority. All other authority has boundaries. All other authority, however far-reaching, is delegated authority under Him and from Him.

² As C. S. Lewis expressed it, "He seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures" (God in the Dock).

³ See Appendix for several examples of God partnering with His church in evangelism in the book of Acts.

⁴ **This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven** (Gen. 2:4).

⁵ **Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground** (Gen. 2:5). God waited to unveil plants until man was there to work the ground.

⁶ Perhaps another aspect of the dominion over animals included enlisting their assistance in agricultural endeavors as is commonly the case whenever farming is practiced without the benefit of machinery.

⁷ Later we will also expand our terminology beyond "rule" and "subdue" to also include "reign" and "put in charge."

Adam was charged to live dependent on God. The forbidden tree represented the choice for Adam to either (a) depend on God to tell him what was good and what was evil or (b) to insist on acquiring that knowledge himself so he could operate independently from God. Sadly, Adam failed that test.

As a result, the glorious "garden of Eden" experience was torn apart by the invasion of sin,⁸ unleashing far-reaching destruction impacting every aspect of the creation mandate, as described beginning in Gen. 3:16.⁹ This culminated with the ultimate consequence. "... [You will work] **till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**" Man's destiny became to **return to the ground**, physical decay and ultimately death.

Sin and the curse had a profound negative impact on man's mandate over creation. But as we will see going forward today, that negative impact was not absolute, it was partial, the creation mandate is still intact. And that negative impact was not permanent, it was temporary. Reminder of our earlier spoiler alert: God wins.

Psalm 8

As we studied Genesis 1 and 2 today, were any of you (like me) marveling (if not even questioning) that God chose to put humans in charge of His creation? I think of the majesty of angels, displayed for example in the Luke 2 (2:13-14) scene where a multitude of angels lit up the sky announcing to the shepherds the birth of the Savior. And yet God put man (not angels) in charge of His creation. If we are thinking along those lines, we are not alone, we are actually in good company. The author of Psalm 8, David, expressed that same sentiment.

There is something else special about Psalm 8. It is one of the rare instances where the Bible contains commentary on earlier Bible passages. Both Jewish and Christian Old Testament (OT) scholars have long recognized Psalm 8 as inspired reflection on Genesis 1:26-28.¹⁰

Picking up in verse 3:

- **3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;**
- **4 What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?**
- **5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!**
- **6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet.**

The Psalmist stands along with us in marveling that God chose to put man in charge of His creation.

Hebrews 2

⁸ Presented in a single understated verse, **When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate** (Gen. 3:6).

⁹ (1) **To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children ..."** (3:16a). Women are deeply aware of the intensity of pain that now accompanies the "be fruitful and multiply" aspect of the creation mandate. (2) **"... Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you"** (3:16b). Marriage that was created to be this incredible partnership where complementary spouses bring out the absolute best in each other devolved into what is often an adversarial and deeply hurtful relationship. (3) **"... Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; ... by the sweat of your face you will eat bread"** (3:17b-19a). What was created to be fulfilling highly productive work ("ruling over" creation) was "cursed." Productivity was impaired by "thorns and thistles." Work commonly became onerous labor.

¹⁰ Verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 8 repeat verbatim the scope of man's dominion from Gen. 1:26-28, just in a different order.

To date, the outcome of God's plan giving mankind dominion over His creation is stained by the wreckage that resulted from Adam's failure to fulfill God's stewardship for him. But fortunately, we are not left there, that is not the end of the story. There was another man who succeeded marvelously where Adam failed.

We may be tempted to treat Jesus' life up to His final week like the opening act at a concert. We might see it as in some sense "filler" until the "main events" of His last week when He became the Lamb of God on the cross who took away the sin of the world and then rose from the dead demonstrating that He had defeated death.

But through His obedient life Jesus also accomplished an essential mission. He fulfilled how God intended His representative image-bearing man to live, always operating within the authority the Father had delegated to Him.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the gospel of John where Jesus repeatedly makes statements to the effect of "the Son never acts on His own, He always does what the Father tells Him to do."

- **"The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner"** (John 5:19).
- **"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"** (John 5:30).
- **"For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me"** (John 12:49-50).
- **"The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works"** (John 14:10b).
- **"So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me"** (John 14:31a).
- **"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"** (John 15:10).

The Father sent the Son with a mission to do the Father's will. And through His obedient life (in the face of profound suffering) Jesus faithfully and completely fulfilled that mission.

You may remember from our sermon series last summer how Hebrews 2 tells that story. Just as Psalm 8 is an inspired commentary on Gen. 1:26-28, so Hebrews 2 is an inspired commentary on Psalm 8, identifying Jesus as the ultimate Son of Man. He was the fulfillment of what God created man to be, botched by Adam, fully realized by Jesus.¹¹

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere [Psalm 8], saying, "What is man, that You remember him? Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands [i.e., "You put him in charge"]. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor ... (2:5-9a).

Because of His faithful obedience, all the way to the cross, Jesus has been **crowned with glory and honor**. Jesus has been crowned and will be exalted to reign.¹²

The familiar passage in Philippians 2 also explicitly connects Jesus' faithfulness in suffering with His coming exaltation to reign. First, the faithfulness.

¹¹ Note that this is not Jesus the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. This is Jesus the entirely faithful Son of Man

¹² Heb. 1:13 identifies Ps. 110:1 as the Father's promise of the coming reign of the faithful Son, **"Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."**

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

Followed by the resulting exaltation. **For this reason also** ["for what reason" - because He was obedient to the point of death] **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).**

Because He was the entirely faithful man, when Jesus returns **every knee will bow**, He will reign righteously on earth over all the nations.

Reigning

Now let's follow the lead of Heb. 2 and Phil. 2 and transition from looking back ["why are we here?"] to looking forward, "where are we going, what does the future hold for us?" We saw in Genesis 1 and 2 that God chose to partner with humans to carry out His purposes, a role in which Adam failed but that Jesus fulfilled perfectly through His obedience and faithfulness, resulting in glory and honor for Him. So now we are not surprised to learn that Jesus will choose to partner with faithful human servants (this time in resurrection bodies) to help carry out His purposes as He reigns over His kingdom (i.e., to "reign with Him").

Listen to Jesus' words in His parable of the talents. **His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master'** [Matt 25:21].¹³

In one of His letters to the churches in Revelation Jesus wrote **"He who overcomes"¹⁴ I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne (Rev. 3:21).**

Paul communicated the same truth in 2 Timothy. **If we endure, we will also reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12a).**¹⁵

But despite this repeated NT theme of reigning with Jesus, some appear to have difficulty connecting with this as a motivating factor, as something to desire and aspire to.¹⁶ Instead it gets replaced with something like "I'm not interested in reigning, I'm just glad to know I am going to heaven, that is enough for me."

Consider this imaginary "vision casting" conversation with a hammer. "You can be such a mighty instrument for good in the powerful hand of a carpenter as he uses you to build structures that will provide shelter and enhance the lives of many." But the hammer responds, "I'm not interested in that, I'm satisfied with just staying in the toolbox." You might respond with a tinge of sadness "but you were created for so much more."

Let's see if we can broaden our understanding of reigning and connect it with things that do resonate with us. I suggest that we think of reigning as any activity we engage in within our sphere of influence

- Where we create or produce something of value, or
- Where we facilitate conditions conducive to the growth and blessing of others.

¹³ And similarly in His parable of the minas. **And he [the master] said to him, "Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities"** (Luke 19:17).

¹⁴ Defined as is one who faithfully endures in the previous chapter, Rev. 2:26.

¹⁵ This calls to mind the frequent appeals of the author of the Hebrews to his readers we saw last summer to partner with Jesus, to faithfully endure in the face of adversity.

¹⁶ Perhaps bad experiences with bosses at work or other authority figures contributes to this aversion.

Let's think about this in the context of parenting. When I have the privilege of teaching in our children's Sunday School classes, I encounter children who have such a brightness about them, who are flourishing as they grow and learn about God and how they can be a blessing to others. The influence of loving parents is written all over their lives. You probably call that good parenting, I suggest we could also call that good reigning, as parents take the "raw material" of the young children God has entrusted to them and invest daily in creating a home environment conducive to helping those children learn about Jesus and grow in faith and love.¹⁷

From there many other images might come to mind.

- "President Jesus, appoint me to your cabinet so I can contribute in significant ways toward advancing Your administration."
- "Coach Jesus, pull me out of the stands and put me into the game to help achieve kingdom wins for You."
- "CEO Jesus, select me for positions on Your leadership team where I can help carry out Your mission."
- Or, using NT terminology¹⁸, "King Jesus, put me in charge of many things, grant me roles of influence reigning with You that will expand my capacity to bless others in Your Name."

Pick whatever image best connects for you with the yearning Jesus put in Your heart to make a difference for Him. And keep that image in mind to inspire you to faithfully follow Jesus, especially when things get tough.

We were created to have dominion, to reign, to make a difference for Jesus. The curse didn't eradicate that purpose, it made it harder, but that underlying purpose for which we were originally created and then redeemed is still there. This "blessed to be a blessing" desire applies both to this life and to an expanded extent during Jesus' 1000-year reign on a transformed earth. Let's turn our thoughts there now.

Coming Attractions

It is difficult to have a life shaped by your future if you have a nebulous understanding of that future, if you don't know what to expect. So let's think together about coming attractions, about what is in store for our futures as believers in the 3 primary eras that make up that future.

1. Current age
2. Jesus' 1000-year reign on earth ("millennium")
3. New heaven and new earth ("eternal state")

[1] Current age

First, what is ahead in our current age? Revelation 6-18 tells us that our current era will conclude (someday) with a 7-year period of great world-wide disruption. God's wrath will be poured out against the great evil on earth, particularly in the last half of those 7 years.

Many of us understand that prior to that 7-year period of "tribulation" Jesus will raise up all believers who had previously died and at that same time take up to heaven all believers alive at the time.¹⁹ At that time both groups will receive their resurrection bodies (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

At the end of those 7 years, Rev. 19 tells us that Jesus will return personally to earth. This time He will not be riding humbly on a donkey as He did on Palm Sunday.²⁰ Instead, accompanied by the armies of heaven, Jesus will return as a conqueror riding on a white horse to defeat Satan's worldwide armies arrayed against Him (Rev. 19:11-21) and to launch His reign.

¹⁷ This concept can also be broadly applied in all sorts of activities where we bring order out of chaos (e.g., building, cooking, sewing, leading).

¹⁸ Matt 25:21,23.

¹⁹ This is commonly referred to as the "rapture", which comes from the Latin word meaning "to seize or snatch".

²⁰ Matt 21:5; Zech 9:9.

{2} Jesus' 1000-year reign on earth (the "millennium"²¹)

The OT repeatedly anticipates, Messiah²² Jesus reigning over a transformed earth. In 2 Samuel God promised David **"your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever"** (7:16).²³

This reign will be one key aspect of the fulfillment of God's covenants with Abraham and Israel throughout the OT. Jesus will personally preside over a fully righteous government.

This era will be initially populated both by people in natural bodies who survive the seven years of tribulation along with believers (from both OT and church ages) in resurrection bodies. King Jesus will appoint faithful believers to reign with Him and be His partners in carrying out His purposes.

This will take place on a transformed earth where much of the fallout of the curse will be reversed. See how the prophet Isaiah describes this transformation.

- **And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,**
- **And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,**
- **And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;**
- **And a little boy will lead them.**

- **Also the cow and the bear will graze,**
- **Their young will lie down together,**
- **And the lion will eat straw like the ox.**

- **The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,**
- **And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.**

- **They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,**
- **For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord**
- **As the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:6-9).**

Throughout this reign Jesus will see that righteousness is widely enforced. But sin has not yet been eradicated. Revelation 20 fills in several details on this era. It tells us this phase of Jesus' reign will last for 1000 years. After having been "bound" throughout that time (v. 2), Satan is "loosed" (v. 7) at the end to deceive many and lead one last rebellion (v. 8). Another spoiler alert: Jesus wins when fire comes down from heaven to devour all those who rebelled (v. 9). At that time Satan is once and forever consigned to the lake of fire (v. 10).

Paving the way for the third and final era ...

(3) New heaven and new earth ("eternal state")

At that time the eternal state will be ushered in on a recreated earth. **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells** (2 Peter 3:10,13).

²¹ From the Latin meaning 1000 years.

²² From the Hebrew word meaning "to anoint", the One set apart and empowered by God for a special purpose..

²³ The angel Gabriel told Mary that her soon to be born son Jesus would be the fulfillment of that Davidic promise. **"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end"** (Luke 1:32-33).

Apparently that destruction and recreation was required for God to eradicate all sin.

The last two chapters of the Bible describe that glorious eternal future.

- **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away** [as we just read in 2 Peter 3], **and there is no longer any sea.**
- **And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.** [This activity takes place here on earth, not up in heaven, the holy city comes down out of heaven to earth.]
- **And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,** [we won't "go to heaven" to be with God, God will "come to earth" to dwell with us]
- **and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away** (Rev. 21:1-4).

Sin, death, tears and pain will all have been eradicated.²⁴

Earth (not heaven) is the final destination

We often talk in terms of "going to heaven" when we die with the unstated implication that is our ultimate destination. But you may have noticed from today's study that our long-term place of residence (both during the millennium and ultimately the eternal state) is here "on earth." This is initially a transformed earth and ultimately a recreated earth, but nevertheless it is "feet on the ground" earth, not "float in the clouds" heaven.

One huge implication of this is that our future holds much more continuity with our present experience than it does discontinuity. Think of the experiences you enjoy in this life, endeavors where you find purpose and meaning. Now imagine much deeper, much richer, much fuller experiences of those things. And being in resurrection bodies means having those experiences not hampered by bodily limitations or deterioration. And ultimately, in the eternal state, with sin having been eliminated.²⁵

This builds upon how life was in Garden of Eden prior to sin and expands on it. A final spoiler alert: God wins, His outcome from Rev. 21 forward likely achieves a superior outcome than if the Fall had never happened.

If you take driving trips you are probably familiar with the Buc-ee's roadside travel centers, a triumph of American marketing.²⁶ My wife loves stopping at Buc-ee's. Whenever we are traveling north on I-35, whether driving to Dallas or beyond, we always stop at the Buc-ee's on the north side of New Braunfels, even though at that point we have only been on the road for one hour. So when we are taking off on a road trip, if you ask us where we're going, we might say "we're going to Buc-ee's." That would be true as far as it goes, but it only tells part of the story. The more complete answer would be "we are stopping off at Buc-ee's on the way to Dallas."

²⁴ Jesus reigns over the throne of David forever. His reign becomes effective commencing with the millennium and then transitions over to the Father for the eternal state, as we recently studied in 1 Cor. 15. **But each [will be resurrected] in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming** [prior to the millennium], **then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power** [at the beginning of the eternal state]. **For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all** (1 Cor 15:23-28).

²⁵ Randy Alcorn did a superb job expanding on numerous implications of this continuity at length in his book Heaven, as well as providing helpful perspectives on our reigning with Jesus. E.g., he writes "Imagine responsibility, service, and leadership that's pure joy. The responsibility that God will entrust to us as a reward can only be good for us, and we'll find delight in it. To rule on the New Earth will be to enable, equip, and guide, offering wisdom and encouragement to those under our authority. We've so often seen leadership twisted that we've lost a biblical view of what ruling, or exercising dominion, really means. God, ruler of the universe, is living proof that ruling can and should be good."

²⁶ Buc-ee's has managed to turn the mundane but required road trip activities of filling up with gas, going to the bathroom, and getting something to drink from something to be tolerated and endured into a destination experience. I was reminded of this again on a recent trip as I drove by countless billboards along the Interstate teasing "286 miles to Buc-ee's". Only in America.

It is true that every one of us who has believed in Jesus for eternal life will “go to heaven” when we die. We will go immediately into the presence of God (that is what makes “heaven” “heaven”). We will be very much alive, fully conscious. But heaven is an interim stop for us because we won’t yet have our permanent resurrection bodies. We were created to be unified body/soul/spirit creatures. But as we saw recently in 1 Corinthians 15, until Jesus returns, He is the only one with a resurrection body (He is the **first fruits**, 1 Cor 15:20). We won’t receive our resurrection bodies until His return.

So heaven is an interim stop on our way to our ultimate destination, which is here, on earth, initially for 1000 years on a transformed earth ruled over personally by Jesus, and then for eternity on a recreated sin-free new earth.²⁷ Our ultimate destination is earth (not heaven). All the lasting, enduring, forever action happens here.

Finishing Well

A primary theme today has been that Jesus will put faithful followers **in charge of many things**. He will honor them with the privilege of reigning with Him, giving them a significant role in His accomplishing His purposes. We have also seen how that is a continuation and fulfillment of God’s original plan from Genesis 1 when he gave humans authority to rule over creation.

If we find the Bible’s teaching that Jesus rewards faithful living not motivating but disheartening, perhaps that is because we are very aware of how we have messed up in our lives. Personally, I have huge regrets that I lived as a Pharisee for far too many years.

But we can all take great encouragement that in this area of reigning with Jesus Scripture emphasizes enduring, particularly in the face of adversity, on finishing well. We saw in our study of Hebrews last year that the message to its readers throughout the book was even though things may get tough, don’t throw in the towel, keep following Jesus no matter what. so that you will be partners²⁸ with Jesus and receive reward.²⁹

Whatever has happened in our lives, however badly we have messed up in the past, every one of us who has believed in Jesus for eternal life has an opportunity to finish well. Every one of us has an opportunity to walk by faith in the good works God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10) from now until He calls us home.

May each one of us be spurred on to live in such a manner that we fulfill God’s original Gen. 1 purpose in creating us, so that one day Jesus will speak these words over us: **"You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master"** (Matt 25:21).

²⁷ There is both significant continuity and significant differences between the millennium and the eternal state. (1) The earth is transformed at the beginning of the millennium (Isa 11; 32:15; 35:1; 40:4; 51:3); it is recreated prior to the eternal state (2 Pet 3:10-13)..(2) Sin is still present in the millennium (though largely under control through the authoritative rule of Jesus); all sin is eliminated in the eternal state. (3) Thus, the Mosaic Law is operational in the millennium but not in the eternal state, the Law will remain until **heaven and earth pass away** (Matt. 5:18), after which there is no sin and thus no need for law.

²⁸ This term (Gk. metachoi) is used of faithful believers in the book of Hebrews.

²⁹ This emphasis on finishing well also comes through in Paul’s personal testimony. We saw just a few weeks ago Paul telling the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:24-27) that he oriented his life in a manner to not be **disqualified** but instead to receive God’s reward. At mid-life for Paul that was still an open question. When he reached the end of his life Paul found great satisfaction in knowing **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"** had led to a **"crown of righteousness"** for him from Jesus (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Despite having been a murderer of Christians earlier in his life, Paul finished well and was rewarded by Jesus.

Appendix

Evangelism is another key area where we see examples of God accomplishing His purposes through His faithful servants. God's "plan A" is that people will hear about Jesus through His servants who are part of a healthy church that manifests His love and speaks His John 3:16 truth. We see that happen repeatedly in the book of Acts.

Acts 8 - An Ethiopian governmental official has been reading the prophet Isaiah. God directed His servant Philip to go meet him on a desert road. **Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him** (Acts 8:35).

Acts 9 (commissioning) - Jesus confronts Saul on the road to Damascus revealing His identity and leaving Saul blind. God directed His servant Ananias to meet Saul in a specific house. **So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit"** (Acts 9:17).

Acts 10 - Cornelius is a Roman military officer who is seeking God. God gave Him a vision to ask for Peter. At the same time God gave Peter a dream instructing him that God wants him to interact with Gentiles. So Peter goes to Cornelius' house and starts telling him and his family and friends about Jesus. In one of my favorite stories in all the Bible, Peter is just getting warmed up telling the story of Jesus including His death and resurrection. But to his surprise he is interrupted when he reaches the point of telling his audience **"of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."** **While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message** (Acts 10:43-44). The instant they heard and believed the "everyone who believes in Jesus" good news, they were saved.

In third world places today when and where there is not a viable church, we often hear instances where God falls back to "Plan B" and testifies to Jesus directly by intervening in miraculous ways. In polytheistic contexts (e.g., Hindus) it often occurs via healings through prayers of Christians, demonstrating that the God of the Bible is the one true God, in response to which people believe in Jesus. In Muslim contexts there are frequent stories of Jesus appearing to people in dreams, in response to which the recipient seeks out a follower of Jesus to learn more about Him.