



B R O A D C A S T T A L K S

Heaven and the New Earth From the Bible and C.S. Lewis

by Randy Alcorn



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BROADCAST TALKS presents ideas to cultivate Christ-like thinking and living. Each issue features a transcription of a talk presented at an event of the C.S. Lewis Institute.



It's wonderful for me to be with you. So let me start on a personal level.

I grew up in a home without Christ. I felt this unbearable sense of emptiness. As I gazed through my telescope, I was in awe at the vastness of the universe, but I felt completely disconnected, without meaning or purpose. I was invited to a church youth group and started reading the Bible, but I had no reference points at all, so it was not just the book of Leviticus that confused me; it was pretty much everything. But when I reached the Gospels, I was immediately fascinated by Jesus. At first, I thought He was fiction or a superhero like in the comics, but everything about Jesus had the ring of truth. And I realized something incredible while reading the Bible: I had come to believe that Jesus was real. And by a miracle of grace, the Lord transformed my life.

Many of you have experienced that as well. The way that this connects with tonight is that, being hungry for truth, I visited a Christian bookstore where I found a book called *The Problem of Pain*. That was the first time I had seen the name C.S. Lewis. I bought the book. I read it. I loved it. I was just stunned by Lewis's insight and clarity. He remembered what it was like to not know God, just as I did. He spoke of longing, and I knew what longing was in *my* life.

In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis cited Romans 8:18 which says, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” [KJV]. And then Lewis said, “A book on suffering which says nothing of heaven, is leaving out almost the whole of one side of the account. Scripture and tradition habitually put the joys of heaven into the scale against the sufferings of earth, and no solution of the problem of pain which does not do so can be called a Christian one.” If you don’t talk about heaven, then you ultimately don’t have a solution to the problem of evil and suffering that’s so huge in our lives.

Lewis was absolutely right. I’ve read many Christian books on suffering — I read sixty-plus when I was writing my book on the problem of evil and suffering, *If God Is Good* — and many of them say almost nothing about heaven, even the Christian books. They’ll mention it in passing; I truly believe that a weak understanding of heaven results in a faith that can’t stand up in the face of suffering. That’s when this gets very practical in every way. Lewis had left atheism and agnosticism and come to embrace a biblical worldview, which he believed had a far greater explanatory power than his atheism. That really resonated with me.

So I went back to that Christian bookstore, and guess what I found? Lewis’s Space Trilogy: *Out of the Silent Planet*; *Perelandra*; and *That Hideous Strength*. I had thought I had to leave science fiction behind me. You know, imagination was a sin, I thought, as a young Christian. I don’t know how I got that impression. But there was such deep theology in *Perelandra* alone; I just ate it up. And then I read *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and it deepened my longing, not just for what theologians call the intermediate heaven or the present heaven, but the future post-resurrection heaven, which the Bible calls the new earth. Reepicheep, the valiant mouse, was going after Aslan’s country, pursuing it, seeking a person and a place that he was made for, a real, physical place.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, “this light and momentary affliction is

preparing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” [quotations in this introductory portion are from the ESV]. Check out 2 Corinthians 11 sometime for a record of what Paul is calling light and momentary afflictions. You could think, *This guy, whoever he is, he doesn't really know the kinds of afflictions that I've been facing.* Well, Paul lists these light and momentary afflictions: prison, flogging, five times the forty-lashes-minus-one, three times beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, a day and night spent in the open sea, rivers, bandits. He talks about danger from Jews, danger from Gentiles, danger everywhere he went, often without sleep, hungry, thirsty, naked, cold. And he says that on top of everything else is this anxiety that he has for the churches. Again, if this is light and momentary, what could Paul be talking about? Does it seem almost offensive?

My wife is in stage-4 cancer right now; it's in her lymph nodes. Our dear dog is dying of cancer; a close friend's wife is struggling with dementia. So does it seem like an insult to call these light and momentary sufferings? What we have to do, I think, is weigh them against what's on the other side of the scales. That's what Paul is saying to do. That's the “eternal weight of glory.”

Maybe you feel like your sufferings are like the Rock of Gibraltar. That's really heavy, incredibly heavy. But then what if on the other side of the scales God placed the planet Jupiter? or a galaxy? or the universe itself? Then all of a sudden, you'd go *Wow! Okay!* This is the eternal weight of glory. And that's what God is telling us in Romans 8:20 and following where Paul has said what he does about light and momentary afflictions, or a parallel passage, that is. He says, “For the creation was subjected to futility” as we human stewards fell, the whole creation fell under us, it fell on our coattails. This is a curse, and God has put into us a nostalgia for an Eden that we've never really known. We've never really experienced Eden firsthand, but we have this sense that that's the way it's supposed to be, and that something is badly wrong with the world, and that's what Romans 8 is telling us. Something *is* badly wrong. At the end of verse 20 and in verse 21, it says: “...in hope

that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The same creation that fell on humanity’s coattails shall rise on its coattails. That’s what we’re told in this great passage. Verse 22 says: “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

The Resurrection

But the groaning is not death; it’s the difference between death and childbirth; it’s the coming of new life, even with its pains. And it says in this passage that the whole creation, not just people but the whole creation, suffers. What else suffers besides human beings? Well, figuratively, forests and mountains and meadows maybe, but literally, animals experience suffering. “And not only the whole creation, but we ourselves,” we’re told in the next verse, “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as [God’s children], the redemption of our bodies.” So the whole creation is groaning as it awaits something. And what it awaits is the redemption of our bodies. That’s the resurrection. The resurrection is the key. Understanding the resurrection is the key to understanding heaven and the nature of the eternal heaven God has in store for us. Resurrection is the hinge also upon which the problem of evil and suffering turns. So again, it’s what’s on the other side of suffering that everything else in life here pales in comparison to.

So the key to creation’s redemption is our own resurrection. The resurrected Christ said to the apostles, Look at me, look at my hands! Look at my feet! It is I myself, the same Jesus who walked this earth with you! It’s like Job says in Job 19: I *know* that one day I will see my Redeemer on a new earth, I will see Him with my own eyes, I and not another. The resurrected Christ said to the apostles, Look at my hands and feet, it’s I myself. He says, touch and see. I’m not a ghost, he says. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as I have. So He’s telling us about His resurrection body, which has flesh and bones. Remember how He ate and drank with the disciples? Then what happened? The



food stayed inside of Him; it didn't fall through Him like He was a ghost. He actually fixed breakfast for the disciples. He was with them forty days in a physical, resurrection body. He says, Touch Me, handle Me. He says to Thomas, See who I really am. This is really Me.

So Christ's resurrection body, we're told in Scripture, is the firstfruits or the prototype of ours. He walked the earth; we will walk the earth. The resurrected Jesus occupied space; we will occupy space, and, yes, there will be time, though I don't have time right now to get into that. But it's not just our bodies that will rise; it's the earth itself. It's not just that God redeemed *us*, but He's going to redeem the whole world. You know, sometimes we think — if we look at the early chapters of Genesis when God designed man and woman to rule the earth to His glory, and then we think, we imagine sometimes: Oh, Satan destroyed all that. Satan completely dismantled the plan of God because how many men and women in all history knew what it was to rule the earth to the glory of God? I mean, Adam and Eve. And then sin and a curse came into the world. But God teaches that Satan didn't win that. The whole point of Jesus's coming is not simply to snatch our souls out of this world so they can go off and live in a disembodied spirit realm of angelic beings. Rather, it's that He redeems *us*, and His plan is to redeem the earth itself.

God's Redemptive Plan

So how far will redemption reach? Isaac Watts was not just a great hymn writer, he was a great theologian, and he nailed it in "Joy to the World," where he says, "...far as the curse is found." That's how far redemption goes. God's redemptive plan includes not only human beings but all the groaning creation; people and animals and earth itself, and God will not abandon His creation. He will redeem it. Isaiah 65:17 says, "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth." And just eight verses later, it says this: "'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the Lord" (NIV).

This is even restored and even magnified. A lot of people apply these verses about the animals in Isaiah 65 and other passages only to a thousand-year millennial kingdom. Now, a lot of people have different beliefs on this, and we don't all have to believe the same thing about the millennium; there are amillennialists and post-millennialists and pre-millennialists. I believe in a literal millennium, but I don't believe that that's exclusively what this passage is talking about, and the big clue is, it says it's talking about the new earth. So yes, there are things in that passage that have to be understood and interpreted in light of that reality. But, nevertheless, we're told that all creation is going to be in harmony, and that's the way God designed it. It was experienced by only a couple of people and those original animals in the garden. But 2 Peter 3:13 tells us, "We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (NIV). Righteousness! The world *full* of righteousness!

A New Earth

Now when the Bible talks about a new earth, some people act as if it's not going to be a real earth, not like this earth. Well, think about this: If I say I'm going to give you a new car, what would you think? Would you think, *Well, that car isn't going to have an engine, and it's not going to have a transmission, and it's not going to have a steering wheel, and it's not going to have brakes?* No. If it didn't have those things, it wouldn't be a car. A car is a car; a new car is a car. A new body will be a body. We know this. Look at the body of Jesus. They recognized Him. He had body parts; He had hands and feet, He was showing them, He was fixing meals and eating with them. So a new body is a body; a new earth will be an earth, first and foremost it will be an *earth*, not a non-earth. You see, *new* is the adjective and *earth* is the noun, and nouns are the main thing. God would not call it a new earth if it was not a *real* earth. God has a good vocabulary, and He knows how to use words.

Our bodies are going to be destroyed at death, right? But they will be



resurrected so that the new bodies are the old-bodies-made-new. We know that. Christ's resurrection body was the same body that died. How do we know that? Because the tomb was empty, and because He showed them the scars. Now I think many others of us will have scars from this life, but He took *our sufferings* and *our sin* upon Himself. And that's the story of redemption.

In any case, we are told in 2 Peter 3 that the old earth — the earth that we're on right now — that earth, under the curse, that earth will be destroyed. So some people say, *Well then, what are you talking about, an earth in our future?* That's what the new earth is because the old earth that's destroyed will be raised in the form of a new earth just as our old bodies will be raised in the form of our new bodies.

So there's an irony, and that is that people today often edit the Bible, to make it sort of say and mean supposedly what they want it to, to fit their desires, but the really, truly ironic thing is that what the Bible actually teaches about heaven is far more attractive than what we usually believe. There's the present heaven; that's where we go when we die. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Wonderful! That's a great thing, to die and be with Christ, Paul says, is better by far. That's the present heaven where God dwells now, where God's throne is now, where God's people dwell now. But here's the radical teaching of the Bible. Revelation 19: There will be resurrection, and after the resurrection, there will be (Revelation 21) a new heaven and a new earth. And then God will relocate heaven from where it is presently, the present heaven, to the new earth. And all His resurrected people will live on this new earth. The reason we don't go immediately to the new earth when we die is that the resurrection hasn't happened yet. God creates the new earth after the resurrection and says, Here's my place for you to live forever, and I will dwell with you. So one of the greatest gifts we can give our children and our grandchildren is to teach them the doctrine of the resurrection and the new earth, and teach them they're made for a Person and a place. Jesus is the person. Heaven and ultimately the new earth, the eternal heaven, is the place they were made for.

So God made Adam from the earth and for the earth, and He made him to walk on the earth and to rule the earth along with Eve, and that was not a mistake. And that's why a platonic, disembodied spirit, that the Bible doesn't teach at all is just not a satisfactory answer. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: If there is no resurrection, "we are of all people most to be pitied" (NIV). So our physical sufferings on earth just can't be rectified by a disembodied existence in another world. These very bodies that suffered will be raised and live without suffering on the new earth. And in that promise of a new earth in Revelation 21:4, Jesus says He will wipe away the tears from every eye. And I think not just the tears from our eyes but the *reason* for the tears and all the suffering. It says there will be no more suffering; there will be no more pain; there will be no more death. Revelation 22 says, no more sin, the curse will be lifted! What a beautiful thing it will be.

So God's ultimate plan of redemption is not relocating us as disembodied spirits to live forever in an angelic realm, but to bring us down ultimately to a new earth that He will create, where we will live as resurrected believers. *We*, meaning *we who know Christ*. You do need to place your faith in Christ. It's not a heaven that's automatic for everybody, because the Bible teaches that we're sinners. But for the redeemed people of God who have accepted the gift of eternal life offered by Jesus Christ, redemption is not the end of life in this world. Ultimately it brings us back for eternal life in this world.

So the exact wording of Revelation 21 [ESV] (I'm going to take parts of the first four verses) is that "then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." You see that's an explicit statement that heaven will be relocated from where it is now, what we call the present heaven, or the intermediary heaven, as sometimes theologians call it, and He will bring heaven down to earth — literally, heaven on earth. Will there be heaven on earth? Well, we can't make it that way. Human beings won't make it heaven on earth, but God will bring heaven down to earth. And then it says, "I heard a loud voice from the throne

saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.’ That means men and women, mankind. And then He says it twice more. God will dwell “with them.” Where? On the new earth. And God Himself will be “with them.” Again, He says it three times in one verse, but for some reason we sometimes just don’t get it. But that’s what it’s saying. God will come down and dwell with us on the new earth, and He will relocate His throne there. We see His throne in Revelation 22. His new dwelling place (Revelation 21) will be on the earth. Well, where’s heaven? Heaven is wherever God’s throne and dwelling place are.

So when we die, if we know Jesus and we go to live with God, what we’re doing is we’re going to live with God in *His* place. And that’s the way we routinely think of heaven. For now, that’s true. We go to live with God in His place. But the new earth that is promised in Revelation 21 and 22, and in Isaiah 65 and 2 Peter 3:13 and other places in the Bible — the new earth is God coming down to live with us in *our* place and bringing His people down to planet Earth — redeemed earth, new earth — to live with us in our place. And that’s Immanuel. Remember that name of Jesus? *God With Us*. So ultimately the eternal heaven is not us going up to live with God in *His* place; it’s God coming down to live with us in *our* place, and it’s the resurrected Christ, the King of humanity, the King of kings, ruling over the new earth. And under Him, His kings and queens. You know, some who have been faithful in this much, ruling over five cities and some ruling over ten cities and dwelling together and celebrating on that new earth. His servants will serve Him.

You think it’s going to be boring? No! Servants always have things to do, places to go, people to see. You only think of heaven as boring if you think of it as drifting around in this spirit realm that wasn’t really made for human beings. But God has made a place for us, and the ultimate place — for now He’s made a place for us in the present heaven and it’s a great and wonderful place — He’s going to relocate it to the new earth.

C.S. Lewis and Heaven

So this is the marvelous truth, and C.S. Lewis saw it; he wrote about it in *Mere Christianity*. He said, “Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body — which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy.”

So new bodies without the new earth would make no sense whatsoever. Physical bodies aren’t meant to float around in a spirit realm. We need to walk on ground, eating and drinking. Jesus talks about, in God’s kingdom, eating and drinking six or seven times in the Gospels. In *The Four Loves*, Lewis wrote, “We may hope that the resurrection of the body means also the resurrection of what may be called our ‘greater body’; the general fabric of our earthly life with its affections and relationships.”

Well it’s not just that we may *hope*, but I would go so far as to say we have clear, biblically revealed reasons to believe in the resurrection of our *greater body*. Not just our physical body but a greater body that He meant was the earth itself. Lewis talked about the present heaven more than he talked about the new earth. Actually, in some ways the only place — other than allusions or hints like this that I just read — he really talks about the new earth, and he talked about it gloriously, is in the form of a new Narnia at the end of *The Last Battle*, the finale of the Narnia books. But again, if we weren’t told there is going to be a new earth, we’d almost have to suppose there was one because where are all these new bodies going to live? Where are we going to be when we eat and drink? Aren’t we going to have tables, and isn’t there going to be a floor? And isn’t there going to be ground to live on? And the answer is yes. The resurrection demands a new earth, the body promises it. Do we see this in Scripture? Absolutely: Isaiah 60, Isaiah 65, Revelation 21 and 22. They all talk about the new earth. And the end of Revelation 21 talks about God’s children ruling the earth: the kings of the nations of the earth will bring their

glory into the new Jerusalem. And its gates will never be shut, and they will bring it with splendors and the honor of the nations. And what are these splendors? I think they're probably tributes; people making stuff, creativity continuing. We will still be an image of God, and we will be all the more in the image of God in the sense that sin will not in any way tarnish us or hold us back, hold back our imagination and our creativity. So I think they will bring in tributes to the King of kings. Revelation 22 says His servants will serve Him; well, that's redeemed work and redeemed rest and redeemed eating and drinking. If all that, and we know all that, why not redeemed culture, redeemed agriculture, redeemed music and arts and science and play and writing and reading and redeemed exploration of the world, all to the glory of God. If the current universe declares the glory of God in His handiwork, how much more in a universe that's no longer under the curse?

Do you love the beauty of this earth? I do. I love to dive, I love to snorkel for hours on end. You can't do a lot of that in Oregon, but it's just something I thrill to enjoy, and you may love flowers and gardens, and I think we all love forests and the great lakes of the world and all of that. If there's going to be a new earth and a new Jerusalem, which we are told there is going to be, why not a new Mt. Everest? Why not a new Lake Victoria? Why not a new Grand Canyon? In Matthew 19, Jesus said — these are His words — “at the renewal of all things.” Now *all things*, in the Greek, means all things, which is why all the Greek experts translate it *all things*. “When the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [v. 28]. Renewal is one of the many “re” words in the Bible, there's redemption, regeneration, restoration, reconciliation, resurrection. Sometimes we miss those “re” words because of the way we pronounce them, but re means going back. It doesn't mean creating something that's never been. It means restoring something that's been lost, and now it's in a better-than-ever form. In Acts 3:21, Peter said that Christ must remain in heaven “until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” Again, His mission is

not obliteration; it's restoration! So what does it mean that one day God will restore everything? Again, it means the biblical doctrine of the new earth, and the great thing is that if we realize this, we will no longer have to have bucket lists. We will no longer have to grab for everything we can grab in this world because, you know, you only go around once. This is our only opportunity to really experience the wonders and joys and beauties of this world. No, it's not! The best is yet to come so if you're disappointed because there were things you really would have liked to do, things that were on your bucket list and now you're realizing you're not going to be able to do because of your own health, or maybe your spouse's health or your financial situation. Whatever it is, for whatever reasons you can't do some of the things you longed to do, the best is yet to come! We do not pass our peaks in this life. So don't let the evil one fool you into thinking that you have passed your peak.

I'm 66 years old now. I go out and play tennis with my grandsons, but I'm slowing down. I cannot play tennis the way I used to, though sometimes my mind tells me I can, and that's when I get in trouble and hurt myself, because I'm trying to force my body to do something it can't do anymore. But my point is, I'd be depressed if I thought that I had passed my peak. Well, here's the thing. Not only have I not passed my peak, I have never seen my peak. My peak will not come until the resurrection, and I will never be less than at my peak. And the same is true for all of us. That's just the doctrine of Scripture. He's going to wipe away the suffering and the results of the Curse. With the Curse gone, we will not experience the results of it the way we do in this world. So when you think of heaven, don't think: *Well, there won't be any pain because we'll just be spirits without bodies and without a body you can't have pain. We'll be floating around.* It's like we think of heaven as the absence of the negative. Let's think of the promise of the new earth, as the presence of the positive. Most importantly of course, being with Jesus! Most importantly worshiping *Him*, the King of kings and Lord of lords, our Savior, our King worthy of all worship. All the missed opportunities in this life will be replaced by billions of better opportunities forever. So when you think about the promise of

heaven, think about the amazingly good news that God has in store for us, a redeemed physical world. No child wants to grow up to be a ghost. If we give our children the impression that heaven is this ghostly existence where all we do is sing hymns forever and strum a harp, and it's going to be boring — no. The greatest adventures await us in the world to come.

In *Letters to Malcolm*, C.S. Lewis said this: “I can now communicate to you the fields of my boyhood — they are building-estates today — only imperfectly, by words. Perhaps the day is coming when I can take you for a walk through them.” So he suggests a continuity between this earth and the new earth.

God put us here. We met Christ here, He revealed Himself. So this is the only world we've ever known. And in *The Last Battle* Lewis says this: “The new [Narnia] was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more.” What a picture of the new earth! Will it be different? Of course it will be different, but on the new earth we will say as Lewis said of those in Narnia: The reason we loved the old earth is that sometimes it looked a little like this. Eustace, by the way, was puzzled because he said: “We saw [Narnia] destroyed and the sun put out.” How can you say this is Narnia? And then they say, well yeah, it actually *is* because look at all the familiar places. And 2 Peter 3 says the old earth will be destroyed, and the same context promises the new earth that will never die.

So what do we find in the final two chapters of the Bible? A wrap-up, a return to the first two chapters but far more and far better. In Revelation 21 and 22, we see the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God, and the tree of life, which by then is a forest of life growing on both sides of the river. The new Eden, no longer any curse. The Redeemer has come and righteous humanity is now going to rule the new earth under King Jesus forever! So the great news is if we know Jesus, that's where we are going to be.

And so let me finish where Lewis finishes the Chronicles of Narnia. What a picture of what awaits us in the world to come. And, by the

way, remember that Lewis is writing fiction, but God is writing in Revelation 21 and 22 and other passages blood-bought promises. It is by the blood of Jesus that these truths and eternal realities are guaranteed. So just luxuriate as I have as I was rereading this this morning.

In the last chapter of *The Last Battle*, “Farewell to Shadowlands,” Aslan gives the children shocking news that’s really, ultimately, good news. He says, “There *was* a real railway accident.” Remember, that’s how the book began; it seemed like there was an accident but they didn’t know. And then Aslan says, “Your father and mother and all of you are — as you used to call it in the Shadowlands — dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

Lewis continues, “And as [Aslan] spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion.”

Guess what he began to look like? I think the Savior, Jesus. The book ends:

He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

[Video of the complete version of this talk, including Q&A, is available at: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Heaven>. Additional information about the topic of this talk is included in Randy Alcorn’s book *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004) and in “C.S. Lewis on Heaven and the New Earth: God’s

Eternal Remedy to the Problem of Evil and Suffering,” a chapter Alcorn contributed to the book *The Romantic Rationalist: God, Life and Imagination in the Work of C.S. Lewis*, edited by John Piper and David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).]



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