

Paradise Peers

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
Hebrews 11:13*

Introduction

Change your whole latitude.

Miles away from ordinary.

If you are a sports enthusiast, you've heard these two slogans during a commercial break. They are the former and the current slogans for Corona Beer. Their ads feature people relaxing on sandy beaches or on a dock looking out on calm seas in a tropical island setting.

The ads work because those images are appealing to most people. We seem to be drawn to tropical islands for rest and relaxation. We even call these destinations, Paradise.

Isn't it odd, then, that almost the very first thing you are told about eternity is, [there was no more sea](#) (Revelation 21:1). **No one** will be sitting on a sandy beach, or on a dock, knocking back a cold one!

I've read a lot of commentaries on why there will be [no more sea](#). The most intense is by Dr. Henry Morris in *The Revelation Record*. He launches into a lengthy scientific explanation involving hydrological cycles and the future ecosystem in an attempt to show scientifically why there will be no more physical need for the oceans.

But what about our emotional needs? What about this feeling we have that relaxing by the ocean is like being in Paradise?

The real value of the words, [no more sea](#), is to change our whole attitude about eternity. The bottom line is this: Eternity is not a *place* so much as it is a *Person*.

Normally we think in terms of “location, location, location.” In eternity we will think in terms of “Lord, Lord, Lord,” as we share intimate personal relationships with the Father, and with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit.

It will **be** Paradise precisely because we will all be with Jesus; and because we will be like Jesus:

1. We will have been (at the Rapture) transformed into our glorified physical bodies that are like His glorified body. We shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (First Corinthians 15:51-53).
2. We will have also become totally conformed to be like Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (First John 3:2).

We will finally be completed. We will be peers with the Lord and with each other. We will be (are you ready) *Paradise Peers!*

Currently we are strangers and pilgrims; then we will be fully sanctified and peers. I want to take a brief look at each of these descriptions. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 A Pilgrim's Patience, and #2 A Pilgrim's Passion.

#1 A Pilgrim's Patience (Hebrews 11:13)

There is a sense in which Christians live backward. Since we know the future, it should affect the present. The apostle Peter put it best when he described the end of this age, then asked, *What manner of persons ought you to be?* (2Peter 3:11).

We ought to be the manner of persons described in Hebrews eleven – patient while on their pilgrim journey. They were waiting patiently

for eternity. Their patient manner of life is summarized in Hebrews 11:13.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

These all technically refers to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I think it's principles are also applicable to every saint in this chapter, and to us.

Hebrews eleven is sometimes called the *Hall of Faith*. Unlike a Hall of Fame, however, you don't have to be a cut above the rest to be inducted. You were already inducted the moment you were justified by grace through faith in Jesus. The purpose of this chapter is not to discourage you by comparison with God's super-saints. It is to encourage you that all God's saints are capable of living by faith.

They *died in faith, not having received the promises* means, *they died before the promises were all fulfilled*. Obviously they had received the promises; they just didn't live long enough to see all of them fulfilled.

The Rapture is, for us, a wonderful promise. I believe it could occur at any moment. But some of us may not live to see it fulfilled. We, too, may *die in faith, not having received the promises*.

But having seen them afar off were assured of them. Earlier in this chapter, in verse ten to be exact, the writer told us one promise was a *city* that Abraham was patiently waiting for. It is this city that was seen by faith *afar off* by our spiritual ancestors. They saw it by faith on eternity's horizon.

1. It is a real *place* which God's saints would *receive as an inheritance* (v8).
2. It would be *in the land of promise* (v9) *but it was not yet on the earth* because,
3. It is *heavenly* and being *prepared* by God (v16).
4. It is *the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (v10).

It is the literal city described in great detail in Revelation chapter twenty-one and twenty-two and called the New Jerusalem. It **comes down from God out of heaven** (21:2) in the future. It is the real place Jesus said He was going to prepare for **you**, too, where you would live with Him forever (John 14).

Hebrews 11:13 ...[they] **embraced them** and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

A **stranger** is someone who is **away from home**. A **pilgrim** is someone who is **on their way home**.

We are away from home but on our way home as we look forward by faith to the heavenly city in which we will live.

Embraced means *to greet*, but with the added idea that it was done gladly. The word translated **confessed** can be translated *admitted openly*. In other words, each day they gladly greeted the hardships of waiting patiently, admitting openly to everyone that their life was being lived for a future destination. As the theme of the conference puts it – they had their **eyes on the prize**.

The larger context of the Book of Hebrews is that the Hebrew Christians were being severely persecuted. They wanted to end, rather than endure, their suffering on earth. To relieve their suffering, they were contemplating going back to the Temple at Jerusalem and returning to Judaism. They should instead be like their spiritual ancestors and see afar off the future New Jerusalem – especially in light of Jesus' warning that their Jerusalem was soon to be overrun and their Temple destroyed.

For us, it's not Jerusalem that we want to return to. Still, there are many *places* or *people* or *practices* that we may backslide to. Instead we can endure even though we, too, are waiting – especially in light of Jesus' promise He is preparing a place for us and will imminently return to take us there.

What about that place – that city? It's described in some detail in Revelation twenty-one and twenty-two.

#2 A Pilgrim's Passion

What will eternity be like? There are a lot of ways we might answer that question. What I'd like to do is highlight a principle feature about eternity in these chapters that we sometimes overlook. In fact, I hope you will see it is a principle feature throughout the entire Bible.

The context of these chapters is **romantic**. It's hard for us to see sometimes – especially as manly men – because we don't easily recognize or comprehend romance. We need to recognize and comprehend romance because our God is incurably romantic.

The Bible contains significant romantic metaphors:

1. Jehovah in the Old Testament describes Himself as the jealous husband of the nation of Israel.
2. Jesus Christ is described as our betrothed Husband; we – the Church – are His waiting bride. The end chapters of Revelation talk about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The New Jerusalem we're talking about is described as a bride adorned for her husband.

The Bible contains substantial romantic manuscripts:

1. The Song of Solomon is the romance of relationship. It is primarily a book celebrating romantic love in the relationship between husbands and wives. It also speaks, though, of the love of God for His beloved - of His love for you.
2. The Book of Ruth is the romance of redemption. The book presents an important teaching in the biblical doctrine of redemption. You see there that redemption is possible only through a kinsman-redeemer. God could not redeem apart from a mediator, and since only God could redeem it was necessary for Him to become that person. God tells you that important doctrinal truth, though, in the context of a romantic love story! The Book of Ruth tells the commonplace story of a couple who love each other, but their love is a mirror in which we can see the divine love of Jesus for you and me. Boaz is a type of Jesus Christ, and Ruth is a type of the redeemed believer that He passionately loves.

When I taught through the Book of Ruth, I quoted Dr. J. Vernon McGee. He pointed out that in the multitude of theology textbooks he had read or consulted over his many years of ministry, *not one of them* even referenced the Book of Ruth while discussing the doctrine of redemption.

We ignore romance to our own spiritual detriment. If you do not see this dimension of God romancing His saints throughout the Scriptures, you will not ever fully understand and appreciate the Scriptures.

Furthermore, you risk getting drawn into extreme doctrinal positions that are based solely on human logic and reasoning. The love of God is reduced to some cold, impersonal attribute, instead of His passionate romancing of the saints.

What's so romantic about eternity?

We already noted, in our introduction, the mention in verse one of chapter twenty-one, that [there was no more sea](#). It focuses our attention solely on the Person rather than on the place. You don't need a [sea](#) to relax next to because, everywhere you are, you'll see the Lord.

Think of it this way: When you get married, you may go to some exotic locale for your honeymoon. But the chief feature of your honeymoon is being with your beloved spouse. The scenery is no more than a backdrop, or a prop, to facilitate your romance.

Eternity is a backdrop, a prop, to facilitate your romance with Jesus. It is one long unending honeymoon with the Lord.

A little later in the chapter we read something of the construction of the city:

[Revelation 21:9](#) Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

[Revelation 21:10](#) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

Revelation 21:11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal...

Revelation 21:18 The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Revelation 21:19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,

Revelation 21:20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

Revelation 21:21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

I want to concentrate on the building materials. They are precious gems and metals. What do you think about that? I've heard it said that **gold** will be so common that it's being used as asphalt.

That's one way of looking at it. Let me ask you: What do we do with precious stones and gold today? Or, better yet, What do our wives want us to do with them? They are in the jewelry that we give the one we love! God describes your eternal home as a gigantic, encrusted jewel. It would be like you giving your fiancée the Hope diamond. It's an extravagance of His romantic love for you. He's over-the-top when it comes to romance.

Another romantic aspect crops up in chapter twenty-two, verses one and two:

Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Does it strike you odd that there would be **months** in eternity? That there are calendars? That there is still the keeping of time? It does strike you as odd – unless you are romantic.

You see, when you fall in love, you want to always be with the one you love. *But time is against you!* You have to go to work... or

school... or keep other commitments. Before you know it, life is behind you; or your life's partner is gone.

In eternity, time will still be counted – but you will constantly be in the presence of the One you love, and Who loves you. Time will not be against you; it will no longer be ticking away, but piling up. It will be like your boss calling you on your honeymoon, telling you to take all the time you want. The keeping of time in eternity is romantic.

The end of a book is always extremely important reading. Usually the entire story builds up to the end, where the author makes his point, or drives it home. How does the book of books, the Bible, end?

Drop down to verse seventeen. The **Spirit and the bride say** to Jesus, **Come**. As the book ends; as the Bible comes to its close; in the big finale; the Holy Spirit reminds you that you are the **bride**, and Jesus is the Bridegroom. ***That's the point of the whole book!*** It's all about the romance.

Conclusion

All of the events we've studied this weekend can be put in the context of Jesus romancing you:

1. Dennis taught on the seven churches. To Ephesus, Jesus said, **You've left your first love**. First love is the passionate romantic love of your engagement.
2. John taught on the Rapture of the Church. It can be likened to the return of a Jewish bridegroom to fetch his bride to the home he has prepared for her.
3. Xavier brought us to the Bema of Christ. It's when our sanctification will be completed. The wood, hay and stubble gone, we will stand arrayed in pure white, prepared as a bride for her Bridegroom and presented by Him to the Father.
4. Rick described the Tribulation. The romance there is that we will have been removed from the earth prior to its occurring. This corresponds to the part in a Jewish wedding where the bride and groom are wed at the home of the groom.
5. The kingdom on earth, following the Tribulation, that lasts for 1,000 years, can be likened to a marriage feast.

What will eternity be like? We have an expression, *The honeymoon is over!*

In eternity, the honeymoon is on!

