Hell, Heaven…and a God of Love part 9

Matthew 28:18-20

1. God's intention has always been to bless all people – every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue. He blessed Adam and Eve and placed them in paradise (the word "paradise" means "garden"). He called Abraham out when the post-Flood world had once again descended into chaos and told him that through Abraham all nations of the earth would be blessed.

2. On that night in Bethlehem, the angels broke through and declared "peace on earth, goodwill toward mankind" and told us all that it was very good news. And when Jesus was about to ascend to His Father, he called his people together and told them to go into all the world and teach everyone what he had taught them.

3. All my life I've heard this planet described as this "fallen world" and, in some respects, I get that. We sinned and there are consequences. Yet, it is plain in scripture that God will redeem and restore all things – "things", not just people. God intends to change this from a fallen world into a redeemed world and He intends to do that with our help. He has partnered with us. 1st Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:9-10.

4. "Reigning on earth" is what we were supposed to be doing all along. From the instruction given to Adam and Eve to this very day, we are called to tend and subdue this earth. God has been at work through redemptive agents such as prophets, priests, holy women, righteous men, disciples, apostles and through Jesus the Messiah to redeem this world one person and one thing at a time.

5. A quick aside: as we enter the Advent season soon, perhaps it is worth a moment to answer a charge that comes up every year. "Christmas and Easter have pagan origins!" Sure, they do. But they are ours now. We took them. We sanctified them. We purified them and gave them to Jesus. And that is exactly what we are supposed to do. We are in the redeeming business.

6. Over the last hundred or so years, an old Christian teaching has resurfaced and is now quickly becoming mainstream again: that

heaven is here, on a redeemed earth. It makes sense of the multitude of passages that say that a new heaven and new earth are coming for us. And it makes sense of the consistent task God has given us of working in the garden and for justice, mercy, and grace in the here and the now.

7. It also makes sense of passages in Peter and Revelation that talk about us ruling on earth and it helps us grasp a bit of what Jesus was saying when he said: (Matthew 25:23) “If you are faithful over few things, I will make you rulers over many.”

8. Let’s gather a few facts together and see what they tell us.

    a. God intends to save everyone.
    b. God says He will renew heaven AND earth. (not referring to separate realities but using the language of Genesis 1)
    c. We are never told to be good so we can go to heaven.
    d. The culmination of all things is said again and again to be heaven and earth, new, coming into existence or “coming down from above.”

9. How does this work? Two weeks ago, we spent time talking about fire. In that lesson, we reviewed 18 passages that said that God is a fire and uses fire to purify, cleanse and redeem.
    a. A consuming or devouring fire. Fire flows from His presence.
    b. A burning bush that is not consumed. A pillar of fire as a symbol of His presence.
    c. His tongue, breath, eyes and mouth are like flames of fire.
    d. He flashes with fire. His glory is like a flame of fire.
    e. He sits on a throne of fire.
    f. He is a purifying, redeeming fire.

10. At the end of time, we are told that this world and all that is in it will burn with fire. But does that mean that it will go away, be consumed? Lets look at these passages .
    a. Acts 3:19-21. “The universal restoration”
    b. Ephesians 1:9-10. “to gather up in Him all things in heave and on earth.”
    c. Colossians 1:19-20. “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”

d. Romans 8:19-23. “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

11. But what about the burning? The melting away? Let’s go there. 2 Peter 3:10-13. We read the first part of the passage but we forget to look at verse 13 where he says “we wait for a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”
    a. Verse 10 reads, if we translate it literally: “The earth and everything in it will be disclosed.” (CEB – exposed. CSB – disclosed. CEV – seen for what they are. MSG – exposed to the scrutiny of judgment. NASB – discovered. NIV – laid bare.)
    b. What happens when it is all disclosed and judged? A new heaven and earth is brought into being, one that is GOOD, characterized by righteousness.
    c. Why do some versions say “burned up”? In 1516, when the Bible was being translated into English by Erasmus, he used a Byzantine text and translated the word he found there as “burned up.” The KJV also used that phrase. After 1973, newer versions using older, more complete manuscripts and better scholarship changed the wording.
    d. Erasmus knew of only one old text – The Byzantine – but an older, more complete text existed: the Codex Vaticanus. Then, in 1859, Count von Tischendorf found an older set of manuscripts in a monastery in Egypt. We call that the Codex Siniaticus and it is the gold standard to this day. The words used in both of the older, more complete manuscripts mean to discover, lay bare, reveal, or disclose.
    e. A few modern texts still keep the old reading. This is, as Al Wolters has said, a matter of worldview trumping the text. Sadly, this happens more than a few times. So, when we read Peter, we see destruction overwhelming the restoration. We miss the entire point of the passage.

12. The salvation God is bringing to us is not God doing something completely new; it is God redoing, fixing or repairing what went wrong. That is why the message of reconciliation, restoration, redemption and renewal is found in these scriptures.

13. Before we leave the lesson this morning, let me be very upfront about heaven. We don't know much about it. We don't know much about what waits for us except that it will be beyond our wildest, best, and most hope filled dreams.

14. John the Revelator assures us that the gates of heaven are always open…always. Contrast that with the gates of hades which will not be able to stand before the church. We will tear those gates down but our gates will remain open.

15. If this earth is to be redeemed and all people will be saved, how will we fit? Good question! God is able to make all things work and I trust Him to have figured it all out well in advance but may I suggest an answer that intrigues me even though I have no way of proving it is valid?

16. This is a very big universe. There are millions of earth-style planets out there and a lot of star factories pumping out new stars and systems. "faithfully rule over a few things, become rulers over many…" Makes you think.

17. Rest for now in Hebrews 12:1-3, 18-24.