

Re-cap: Echoes of Eden “Wasn’t it heavenly when.....?”

When life was:

- Together (in relationship, end of solitariness, relaxed intimacy)
- Orderly (secure within known and accepted boundaries)
- Purposeful (creative activity; work without stress)
- Abundant (needs met, unashamed enjoyment)

Two principles

(a) We won’t understand everything now. Deut. 29:29. 1 Cor. 13:12

(b) The future is bigger than you think !

I Cor. 2:9 Beyond science, history, imagination.

1. Reality check: we live in a broken, torn apart world.

Sin scatters, spoils, alienates, invites God’s displeasure (wrath).

2. When heaven drew near: God’s repeated, gracious visits in OT times.

Some examples.

Where sin scatters and drives apart, the Lord draws people together, and shows a better way.

(a) The Law.

Revealing God’s plan for life on earth.

Ten Commandments: basic boundaries to promote human flourishing

Pointers to Togetherness, Orderliness, Purposefulness, Abundance.

(b) The Prophets.

Their call to return to God and his plan for living.

Isaiah’s vision of the future: Isaiah 65: 17-25.

3. When Jesus came - heaven breaks in!

- His person (God and man)
- His teaching (how to live on earth in a heavenly way)
- His miracles (healing brokenness)
- His atonement (reconciling heaven and earth)
- His resurrection (the first-fruits of what is to come)
- His Spirit (a foretaste, down-payment)
- His Church (a colony of heaven)

4. Understanding the tensions of where we are now.

“The Already”: 2 Cor. 5:17 Receive it, Enjoy it, Live it.

“The Not Yet” Phil 3: 20-21 & 1 John 3:2-3. There’s more to come!

When Jesus comes again - bringing heaven to earth.

1. "What happens when we die?"

Death marks the separation of soul and body.

The souls/spirits of believers go to be with Christ (Luke 23:42-43)

Our bodies are returned to the earth, awaiting the Lord's Return.

The rest we leave behind!

In this Christian framework we try to learn to live with our mortality, realistically facing:

(a) Our stewardship of this world's goods.

(b) The privileges and challenges of ageing.

(c) Increasing weakness, probable pain as the "birthpangs" of the new age to come.

(d) But with opportunities for spiritual growth: 2 Corinthians 4:16 -5:10.

2. "Why don't we go straight to the new heaven and earth?"

See 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18.

This passage answers the concern the dead might miss out on the Return of Christ.

Jesus will return, bringing heaven (including believers who have died) to earth. Those on earth (still embodied) will be re-united with them.

Note repeated theme: we will be "together" (v.17-18). The party will not start till everyone is there!

3. "What kind of bodies will we have?"

Legitimate questions. The Scriptures indicate continuity and discontinuity.

****The resurrection body of Jesus is the key.****

They did not at first recognise Jesus in his transformed body. (John 20:15. Luke 24:16, 31.)

But he was the same (his scars, pierced side). He was not a "ghost" but solid, could be touched.

This the pattern for our bodies at the final resurrection, and for the earth itself.

1 Corinthinans 15: 51 -52

We shall not all die. Some will be alive when Jesus returns.

But all will be changed, transformed with bodies suited to life in the new earth and heaven.

Sin and death finally defeated with no further hold on us (v. 54-57). So "stand firm" (v.58)

4. "What will be the future of the earth?"

God's purposes embrace the whole of creation, taking us back to the beginning of the Bible's story.

It is God's world, and his purposes will finally be fulfilled, not frustrated.

Romans 8: 18-25.

It is the same pattern of continuity and discontinuity, with the resurrected body of Jesus as the key. He is literally the first-born of a new creation. (Colossians 1: 15-20).

Ecologists rightly work to try to "save the planet", reduce pollution and the impact of climate change, traceable back to human failure to be good stewards of the earth.

Such efforts, if successful, could delay the decay of the earth.

Only God, however, can (and will) renew, transform and recreate his world.