

Week 4 Feb. 5

Exploring Heaven *Does Heaven Begin On Earth?*

“Heaven starts after death.” This statement is both true and not true. How can that be?

Kreeft says we possess powers now that are indications of what lies ahead.

- Immortality
- Faith
- Self-giving love (agape)
- Power to perform miracles

During life they serve as *appetisers*. Is that how you see such powers/gifts?

Do you agree with Kreeft that memory can heal the past?

What can we do to make earth more like Heaven or Hell?

Kreeft suggests some truths and moral obligations remain unchanged, they are eternal. Can you name one or more moral obligations that never change?

Main Thought

Week One: *Why talk about Heaven?*

Heaven gives hope, purpose and meaning to life on earth.

Week Two: *What is Heaven and where is Heaven?*

The Redeemed will not be disembodied spirits, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.

Week Three: *What Is There To Do In Heaven?*

“Each soul will be eternally engaged in giving away to all the rest that which it receives.”

Week Four: *Does Heaven Begin On Earth?*

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Handout

Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven*, excerpts

Is Heaven now or after death? Both the “here and now” view of Heaven and the “after death” view of Heaven implicitly assume that Heaven is chronologically dateable. But Heaven is eternity and all of time is present in eternity. From Heaven’s point of view we simply *are* in Heaven, from our earthly point of view we will be, or hope to be, in Heaven. From one point of view, a tiny baby is fully human (not an onion or a turtle!); from another, the baby has yet to become fully human.

We must also remember, when we ask when Heaven is, that Heaven is not first of all a place but a life, a spiritual lifeblood. The New Testament calls it “supernatural life”, “divine life”, “eternal life”, “the Kingdom of Heaven”. This is why the Father sent His Son: to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, to begin eternal life in time, to put divinity in humanity, first in Christ and then the Christian. When we thus become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet.1:4) we do not lose our human nature anymore than the world lost its nature when God entered it. Right now, therefore, if we believe, we

are in Heaven. Right now, in our humanity and temporality we taste “the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5) Right now we “can do all things” through Christ (Phil. 4:13), for He promised that “he who believes in me will also do the works that I do” (John 14:12).

Four powers, especially, four “powers of the age to come” that are now tasted as appetisers, stand out in the pages of the New Testament. If we do not know we have them, we need a faith-lift.

1. First, we have an eternal, immortal life that conquers death and the fear of death. Having Christ’s life we also have His resurrection.
2. Second, as we share divine *life*, we also share divine *light*. This light is primarily simply the gift of faith. Faith is a way of seeing.
3. The third power of eternal life is *agape*, the love that only God can have by nature because it is pure gift-love, not need-love. We help others partly because we feel good when we do. Our motives are always mixed; God’s are pure. The ecstasy of love is our training for Heaven because it constructs a self that lives outside itself, which is the only kind of self that can live in Heaven.
4. A fourth power of eternal life is ... the power to work miracles, power over nature and its physical laws. ... it is also the least often seen. Perhaps that is because it is the one least believed. Miracles are rare partly because we do not expect them.

We only “taste” these “powers of the age to come” now, but they are actual, not just potential. “Beloved, we are God’s children now” (1 John 3:2). (*And Paul writes “From now on we regard no one from a human point of view... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” 2 Cor. 5:16-17, NL*)

(Kreeft lists seven common human experiences that are best explained or accounted for if eternity touches time; Heaven touches earth. They are intimations that Heaven is now, that time and eternity flow into each other NL)

1. **Why we hate time.** We are not fulfilled by time, even eons of it. “He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind (heart), that is, our desire (Ecc. 3:11)
2. **Why time goes faster as you age.** It seems a long time from one Christmas to the next for a child, but a short time for an adult. Why? Because we learn to live in larger bites, much as a maturing reader learns to read larger and larger groups of words. This is our way of unconsciously beginning to prepare for eternity, where the “bite” is total. Where we are present to all time at once. Even now we experience a parallel to the infinite speed of eternity where we are simultaneously present to all times: it is the power of thought, in which we are simultaneously present to any and all places. And as we approach eternity by maturing, our “spirit-speed” increases; that is one reason why time seems to go faster as we get older.
3. **Why memory seems magical.** Memory gives something of a Heavenly, eternal view of our past. Memory transforms the past: it changes the meaning of the past. Memory is selective, we remember some events and not others. Perhaps events whose meaning we already understand are remembered, while others are forgotten until the healing of memories, here or in Heaven, shines an eternal light of acceptance and understanding on them. Especially painful past events, like

- rejection by loved ones or wartime traumas, are often forgotten, not only for reasons of psychic self-protection but also for this Heavenly reason.
4. **Why we love to create.** The creative artist participates not only in God's love of creating and power to create, but also in God's eternity. The creative artist lives outside the time of his creation (drama, the musical movement, the flow of syllables) and sees all the moments, all the events of his creation at once. But eternity is our soul's food, our fulfillment, our joy. That is why it is a joy to create. And we can all be creative artists, whether we are musicians or housewives, poets or carpenters like Jesus: creative with our lives.
 5. **Why we experience ecstasy.** *ek-stasis*, standing-outside-yourself. Perhaps you have forgotten yourself in a great piece of music, or some beauty of nature (a sunset, or a storm), or a human love, or an artistic masterpiece, or an inspired thought, or a joyful event like a birth or a healing or a conversion,. Perhaps you have become so lost in it that you seemed to lose all consciousness of time as you lost all consciousness of self. The presence of eternity in time explains this experience, for when we transcend ourselves we transcend time too.

An even commoner way of forgetting self and time is simply reading fiction. Here we transcend time not to eternity but merely to another time, the time of the story. Whenever the spell of great fiction works we have an out-of-body experience. Stories play with time because storytellers transcend time. The story telling mind stands not only in another time but also in eternity, for the story is a whole to the author, even though it unrolls part by part to the reader. But the reader too can share the mind of the author, and the reader's experience is analogous to the believer's, who through Revelation knows something of the mind of the Author of the story he is living.

6. **Why temporal choices determine eternal destiny.** According to Christianity, our choices in time determine our eternal destiny. How can time determine eternity? ... (because), Time is part of eternity, the beginning of eternity. Every choice we make has eternal repercussions. It is a brush stroke in the painting that takes on solidity and life in eternity, the painting that is our own self-portrait. The world's eternity as well as ours begins in time. The consummation of world history has begun. The bride (church) is even now sewing her wedding garment.
7. **Why we know eternal truths and values.** How can the human mind which changes, know changeless truths? Yet it can. Time has nothing to do with whether two plus two equals four. Quintillions of millennia cannot change such truths. God's eternal mind touches every human mind that thinks such thoughts.

The experience of conscience also touches eternity, for conscience tells us "Thou shalt not" or "Thou shalt" with no ifs, ands, or buts. Our essential moral obligation is unchanging and unchangeable. Heaven visits earth in every instance of knowledge by conscience; and every acceptance increases, and every refusal decreases, our participation in Heaven.

Every bit of love, beauty and truth that anyone ever experiences on earth is made in Heaven and is a participation in Heaven. For Heaven is God's presence; and God is present in all goodness, all truth, and all beauty.

A. Kuyvenhoven, *Daylight* Nov. 9, After discussing worship in Heaven he writes:
Today we may already experience something of the freedom and unity of worship. In those rare moments when our prayers turn to praise, we are free. Health, house, money, misery, even sin and guilt are forgotten when we climb the stairway of praise. In those moments when we have nothing to ask and everything to give, we make the great discovery that we were made for God. We realize that God and the Lamb are worthy of the worship of all that exists. And we find unity! Effortlessly we find each other in the praises of our God.