

“This Old World Is Passing Away . . .
O My Soul, What Then? Where Will You Be?”
Sermon for 17 August 2025

Jonathan Edwards asks some crisp, compelling questions under “Direction” in his lecture series (#16 On Charity and Its Fruits). He could have been alluding to “this old world” dissolving in flame, **heaven and earth shall pass away**, or he could have been referring to the spiritual death, death and resurrection, which occurs every time a soul is **born again . . .** the total transformation of our circumstances which occurs, when by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus, we become **new creatures in Christ**. Now this is a bold statement, or declaration to make: inside jail and in this present world order—inside and outside the church!—there are scoffers, mockers and unbelievers who simply do not buy it. They may mouth their belief in **being born again** but they keep these new creatures in the suspect file. It is as if Jesus were jesting, or leading Nicodemus on in John 3:7 where Jesus flatly declares you must be born again *if you hope to even enter the kingdom of God!* Friends, Jesus was in *earnest* and so must we be—earnest in repentance, earnest in submitting to Jesus as Lord and Savior and earnest in walking in the truth of our newness in Christ. If we believe that we have been changed, then we need to embrace our transformation, *and that of others* who like us have come home to God and been adopted as his children, coheir with Christ and full-fledged citizens of heaven, or, as it is sometimes phrased, citizens of the New Jerusalem . . . brothers and sisters in Christ, no longer strangers (!) in the world of love that is heaven forever. ***Heaven is where everlasting joy, gladness and delight persist in perpetuity—a state of blessedness and glory just as the Lord Jesus prepared for us!***

It’s Thursday morning and I am thrilled to report that last night two men came to the place of spiritual surrender and, in genuine humility, bowed to Jesus as Lord and Savior. While the men there cheered and applauded, their joy pales in comparison to what transpired in the heavenlies—among the saints and angels and spiritual beings gathered there. Pray for their steadiness, endurance and perseverance on the fight path from this day forward.

So, I have raised two questions: when this old world has passed away, what follows then? And where will we be? According to Jonathan Edwards, there are three worlds: there is this present world in which we are presently situated, a jumble, or chaos of love and hate as we stagger between these diametrically opposed motivations. In addition to this world, there is the world of love (heaven) and the world of hate (hell). We shall spend eternity in either heaven, or hell.

Two observations about hell: First it was never created by God for damned human souls; rather it was a repository for the rebellious, God-hating, fallen angels and death itself. In the day that the world dissolves and is no more, God will enlist the use of this disposal system *for there will be no darkness, evil, or hatred in the realm of grace, glory and love we call heaven—they will be removed from heaven, and placed elsewhere*. Secondly, God doesn’t send people to hell; hell is self-elected. ***No one goes there who doesn’t choose to do so***. Our freedom of will and the companion moral accountability dictates that this be so. The choice for hell isn’t necessarily choosing to go to a place of everlasting torment. It is more commonly associated with the choice to hate. While I do not believe that God’s character needs any defense at all, this reality—that we choose heaven, or hell by virtue of hating, or loving, exonerates God of moral culpability in the ***what then*** category. So God doesn’t send, or condemn people to hell arbitrarily—or worse, capriciously!—This applies to the unborn, the incapable, and the non-evangelized folks. The belief that the non-evangelized (the heathen, or pagan populations) are judged by their works—hateful works which lead to hellish retribution, loving and merciful works lead straight to heaven, and blessed recompense. I believe that this aligns with the spirit of the law and the commandment to love God first and others also in a non-legalistic framework. **God does not rejoice in the death of even one evil man.** (Ezekiel 33:11 and 2 Peter 3:9) Those that God can save, he will save—always acting on the impulse of love and mercy.

Now Rev. Edwards also asserts that “we naturally desire peace and rest.” Do we all? Do those whose life experience is one of cruelty and abuse “naturally” have such a healthy impulse? I have reason to doubt that. No, given that hurt people hurt people, given that we have generational curses to cope with and that some folks so wounded that they do not register love as something they’ve experienced (although they may be ignorant and blinded)—they feel the world is so heartless, and they are spiritually homeless. They imagine themselves poor, despised and hated that they trust no one and seek no friendship here in this world. What an agony of isolation and loneliness! Who is not moved to sympathy and compassion?! *They should seek friendship there in heaven where no contempt exists—all are honored and all are valued—heaven is a realm of full, felt esteem.* Walking past the suffering, the cruelty, abuse and neglect—all manner of ill-treatment—is challenging, but necessary. There is no shame in needing rescue; the only shame is our refusal to accept the proffer. And we succeed by choosing to love rather than to hate. If we are oppressed, and afflicted, we must raise our eyes heavenward—and live forward to that better world, that better country.

Outside of these exclusions to our natural desire for peace and rest (and probably more exclusions that I have not enumerated), many are indeed looking forward to respite from the storms of contentious living. We should appeal to these, too—both snatched as brands from the fire and those who have lived relatively unsinged. We should be grateful for what we have been protected from as well as conditions that we have been rescued from. Such is the goodness of the Lord.

We should not set our chief good on anything here in this world. We should not indulge in possessions, wealth, or fame. For when the applause stops all that’s left is an empty auditorium and litter. *Set your affections on heavenly objects, goals and gains.* Take up conversation with heavenly personages: like God, Christ, saints and angels, the glorified. Seek to add your praises, songs, adoration to their unending worship. **Hear them cheering you on! They are your cloud of witnesses!** Partake of their blessedness now, readying yourself for the hereafter. We should seek contentment in all things: difficulties, obstacles, arduous steps and trials as well as open doors and gates, gradual inclines and so forth. If your friendship with God is real, you will share in all times—good and bad; not just when you are in trouble! With your eyes on the rest, on Christ, the ascent either gets easier, or seems more manageable. Both ways you are encouraged. Behold the present, splendid glory of your Forerunner and let his example inspire your own well-doing. Remember Jesus **who went about doing good.** (Acts 10:38) Christ is your capable Intercessor, your source of love, light, life and power. Focus on “that love,” the divine love which saturates all of heaven and all the relationships, the entire society of saints!!

The “entire society” of the saints. What a concept! Here’s the idea: in heaven we are part of a redeemed people, God’s people a spiritual society for which we have been spiritually socialized! How fascinating. We have naturalized “socialization.” We want our children to be socialized and, commonly, that is assumed to take place at school where, apart from the adult role models, your children are socialized by their peers. This is a practice piped in, I think, from hell. I can’t imagine anyone less qualified to properly socialize our children than other children. The outcome is deleterious (harmful/damaging), some never recover from this malpractice. It would be far better for sober, mature, righteous and godly adults to attend to that socialization. And that is precisely what occurs in our socialization for joining the society of saints—we are trained up by our teachers, mentors, by more mature saints. William Golding’s Lord of the Flies, 1954 (which “lord” is none other than Satan/Beelzebub himself!) portrays the sociological disaster that children training up children produces—Golding’s “a state of nature,” human darkness, quite contrary to utopian expectations built upon theories of original innocence. There is no original innocence, Rousseau was wrong about childhood and “the blank state,” not since the fall of man; there is only mercy. Our “salvation” required an atoning death on a cross, not regressive, or reversed human development . . . a rescue from without, not from anything within us. Self-salvation which has haunted us culturally. Renovation is not recovery, self-help, and it is not rehabilitation. It is a healing only God can do. Too many safe houses are addiction magnets, flop houses and drug redistribution centers.

So if we hope to enter the “society of the saints,” we must choose to live a life of love in the here and now. *We must be divinely socialized—something that begins in this world; presently, where love and hatred vie for our allegiance—where we experienced spiritual warfare and strive for holiness. Where we repent continually, and purify ourselves daily as God works upon us his repairs and wonders of transformation (We are His workmanship fashioned for good works), is where we live prior to attaining glory.* Yes, God is the source of love and, yes, we love God because he first loved us. And yes, salvation is the free gift of God **in Christ Jesus** and the good works we do cannot save us—our works are the fruit of love, the fruit produced by the new creature we become by grace in Christ.

A caution: the church in heaven is perfect. In this it differs from the best of church here on earth. Alas, converted believers have been known to yield to division, strife, quarreling and contention. And many suffer as a result of this spiritual lapse—some even give up on the church. However the church here is imperfect. This fact has huge implications for the exercise of the gifts in the church—**given for the edification of the body**. While the canon is complete and therefore closed, and while the apostolic office as related to the founding twelve in the early church is also closed, there is little indication that an imperfect church, still in need of edification has experienced the entire cessation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That cessation is restricted to the perfected church for as it is written: **when the perfect is come, then prophecies, tongues, word of knowledge shall vanish away** (1 Cor. 13:8). Faith hope and charity remain (v. 13) and so do teachers, workers of miracles, gifts of healing, helps, service and government. These are not expressly terminated and the imperfect church has need of them all *for the time being*. I take that to mean until strife, contention, division, quarreling and fighting, disputing, hatred and anger cease. First things first. These blemishes show we are not yet perfect, not yet heavenly—when we are, then we can talk about cessation of the gifts more comprehensively. And it is not just the church that betrays this lack of readiness. Many converted believers have family strife, disputing with neighbors and townships and governments—contentious behaviors to repent of—for in heaven, in the perfected church, all of this annoyance is ended. Those who are saints must act like saints across the board (**must be gentle, not quarrelsome**) as we await our perfection when Christ appears. That will change everything once all and forever instantly. You decide, are we really there yet?

We must obey God in everything to align ourselves with the saints in light above—those confirmed in heaven *forever*, who enjoy its sweet and everlasting peace **on earth as it is in heaven**. If we love God and love one another we demonstrate our spiritual and moral fitness and **we will be found faithful** both when He comes, or when we find ourselves incorporated above. Where, the curse has been terminated, we shall **not hunger and thirst anymore**. (Rev. 17:16-17) In Paradise, we were created and our needs were met, with the fall needs met was exchanged for being needy—our physical dependency on food, air and water, mirroring our need for spiritual sustenance! Neither hunger, nor thirst pertain in the world of heaven.

So the annoyance of calumny (or lies), contention, envy, warfare and strife . . . of jostling, injury, cruelty, hatred, abuse and neglect are passing away! This I believe with all my heart. Do you?

Meanwhile we all languish here as the man who fell among thieves on the Jericho Road, who was accosted, stripped and beaten and left for dead and, amazingly, he got help from an unexpected direction, a man, a stranger, hated and despised by the Jews—even a worthless Samaritan (contempt, hatred, cultural bias, anyone?) *Who proved to be a loving neighbor—yeah, that guy and not the best of the Jewish best, a priest, and a Levite!—he is most fit for the society of the saints of whom I speak. Proof: he acted out of love.* My fellow saints we should expect to see that man, and millions more just like him, in heaven, the society of friends and world of all saints.

Last Wednesday, stuck in a room with nine men, among whom some were thieves, robbers and violent men, two men heard the call of God. The love of God came down and filled that company. The two repented and cast their all on our King, repenting, yes, and reforming all at once. We, Sue and I and seven other witnesses, were present at their birth! Those became new, new creatures in Christ. God and the angels and his saints, and all those present burst into joyous applause. O momentous occasion! O happy day! Thank you for redeeming, divine love!

Our benevolent and pleasurable God was very pleased just then. He smiled. What an honor and a privilege!

Welcome, men, let your eternal life begin. We welcome you to the church. Make yourselves at home. It's yours to occupy.

Amen