

How Much Heaven Do You Want?

Revelation 22:12

I. An Amazing Resolution by a Teenager

- A. In the Fall of 1722, Jonathan Edwards... a mere nineteen years of age, set down a challenging set of RESOLUTIONS which would govern the rest of his life
- B. This was a common practice in Puritan New England... done by ambitious and high-minded people
- C. George Washington and Benjamin Franklin also made similar sets of resolutions... but theirs were much more WORLDLY and PRAGMATIC... rules of self-discipline for achieving success IN THIS WORLD... their generation's version of SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE; Edwards's resolutions are a masterpiece of godly determination in holiness
- D. They're all worth studying, but #22 captivates me this morning:

#22: Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.

- 1. Amazing! Edwards was determined to do whatever he could IN THIS WORLD to maximize his happiness IN THE OTHER WORLD... that is IN HEAVEN
- 2. That is a revolutionary thought... **How we live our lives in time will affect how we will enjoy eternity**
- 3. Edwards speaks of ENDEAVORING to obtain happiness in heaven... of deeds done

4. Furthermore, he expects it will take EVERYTHING HE HAS to obtain maximum joy in heaven...
5. Notice he speaks of pitching in all the POWER, MIGHT, VIGOR, VEHEMENCE he has... giving every moment of energy, totally consumed at every moment, pouring out all the power of body and soul toward this one end
6. Then, he adds the word VIOLENCE... as though he expects that the obtaining of maximum joy in heaven will take a war on earth

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

7. Edwards expected that obtaining MAXIMUM JOY IN HEAVEN would be VIOLENTLY OPPOSED every step of the way by those ancient spiritual enemies of all children of God: the world, the flesh, and the devil
8. Anyway, that is what Edwards thought—if we would obtain AS MUCH JOY AS POSSIBLE IN THE NEXT WORLD, we would need to fight for it every moment of our lives on earth

E. BUT... Was He Right??

1. Do our works on earth affect our experience in heaven?
2. Can we prove this by scripture? Or is this just the speculation of an 18th century philosopher and mystic Jonathan Edwards, that cannot be rooted in actual texts of scripture

F. This morning: I want to assert that I believe Edwards's 22nd resolution was based on a TRUE UNDERSTANDING of many verses in scripture that show that OUR WORKS as justified saints actually WILL AFFECT our heavenly experience

G. I want to call you to MAXIMUM GODLY AMBITION, and MAXIMUM SPIRITUAL and PHYSICAL EFFORT to obtain as much heavenly joy as you can with whatever time you have left

H. No book of the Bible so clearly predicts our lives IN THE NEXT WORLD as the final Book of the Bible, Revelation... especially the final TWO CHAPTERS of that final Book

Revelation 22:12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

II. Christ Comes Soon With His Rewards

A. The Promise Asserted

1. Christ says **BEHOLD... I am coming SOON**
2. Refers to the Second Coming of the King... when he comes in breathtaking glory to punish his enemies and reward his servants
3. Most of Revelation depicts what Christ will do to his enemies; these last two chapters speak of what he will do for his servants

B. The Promise in Context

1. The Book “Revelation” means UNVEILING... the pulling back of the veil so that we can see invisible spiritual realities...
 - a. Present realities of Christ walking through the seven golden lampstands ministering continually to all the local churches
 - b. Present realities of God enthroned, surrounded by a hundred million angels
 - c. Present realities of the Lamb of God glorified in heaven and reigning on the throne of God
 - d. BUT ALSO future realities

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

The future of the progressive wrath of God on the wicked world: seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls

The future also of the redeemed in a magnificent NEW HEAVEN and NEW EARTH that is coming

2. SOON: Jesus says he is coming SOON

Revelation 22:12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

The final chapter of the Bible says it four times, vss. 6, 7, 12, and 20

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

To which John immediately replies:

Revelation 22:20 Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The word SOON is perplexing to us, because we know that almost two thousand years have passed since Jesus said these words

2 Peter 3:8 With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

The word SOON is to make us perpetually vigilant and perpetually vigorously active doing the master’s will until he comes... Jesus told us in many parables and words to be CONTINUALLY ALERT and ACTIVE and AWARE because he is coming at a time we do not expect him

And when he comes, he will bring his REWARD with him

C. The Doctrine of Christian Rewards

1. He intensifies it by saying this:

Revelation 22:12 I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

- a. The word “reward” (*misthos*) in the New Testament ALWAYS has to do with pay for deeds done... it is never used in connection with justification

Romans 4:3-5 Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

- b. Here Jesus says he will repay everyone according to his DEEDS... for Christians, this immediately brings us to the concept of REWARDS... taught many places in Scripture

Matthew 5:11-12 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven

2. Storing up treasure in heaven

- a. In Matthew 6, Jesus repeatedly warns his disciples about seeking EARTHLY REWARDS for GODLY ACTIONS

Matthew 6:1 “Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

- b. three examples: giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting
- c. In all three cases, he is urgent with us that we NOT do any of them to be seen by others, for then we will receive NO REWARD from our Father in heaven
- d. God notices secret acts of service and WILL REWARD THEM

Matthew 6:6 when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- e. He sums up this section in this way

Matthew 6:20 store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

- 3. We KNOW that Jesus was NOT TELLING US to store up forgiveness of sins or justification... the perfect righteousness needed just to enter heaven at all is given to us freely as a gift through faith in Christ... not as a WAGE but as a GIFT
- 4. So what TREASURE can we STORE UP gradually? Heavenly joy, heavenly reward, heavenly blessings...

5. Jesus made this very plain in Luke 14:12-14, to give a banquet in which you invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind:

Luke 14:14 Although they cannot repay you, you will be REPAID at the resurrection of the righteous.

D. SO... DEEDS on earth **WILL** affect our EXPERIENCE in heaven

E. **However**, I want to make it plain how infinitely glad we should be **JUST THAT WE WILL BE THERE AT ALL**

The thief on the cross:

Luke 23:42-43 “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

He had nothing to show for his life... he lived 99.9% of his life in sin... selfishly hurting others to benefit himself

But he is presently in paradise, in the presence of Christ!!

So it is with all people who will be redeemed... the inheritance of heaven itself will be enough

And no book of the Bible gives us such a powerfully clear picture of the heaven we will all enjoy **EQUALLY**

III. Heaven We Will All Enjoy Equally

A. Clear Description of the NEW HEAVEN and NEW EARTH

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

1. Every saint in heaven will exist forever and ever in the New Heaven and New Earth

2. Rev. 22:3 That radiant world will be free from every curse

3. Equally in radiant, powerful, immortal resurrection BODIES
- B. Equally Surrounded by the Radiant Glory of God in the New Jerusalem
- C. Equally Free to Drink from the River of the Water of Life and Eat from the Tree of Life... it is for ALL the nations (Rev. 22:1-2)
- D. Equally Free to See the Face of God (Rev. 22:4)

These and countless other blessings of our eternity in the world to come will be deeply, richly satisfying to us

All of them given EQUALLY to the saints by the FREE GRACE of God to sinners... based on the work of Christ on the cross

BUT NOW let's address this... what DIFFERENCES will there be in the heavenly experience of the saints?

FOUR briefly...

- Some Saints Will Enjoy More Rewards Than Others
- Some Saints Will Enjoy More Glory Than Others
- Some Saints Will Enjoy More Authority Than Others
- Some Saints **May** Enjoy More of God Than Others

IV. Heaven Some Will Enjoy More Than Others

A. Some Saints Will Enjoy More Rewards Than Others

1. As we've seen, Jesus urged us to STORE UP treasure in heaven... there is NO LIMIT SET to how rich we can be in rewards
2. The WIDOW with her two small copper coins will be rewarded
3. Every cup of cold water given to help the spread of the gospel will be noticed and rewarded
4. We know this is ALL BY GRACE! We don't deserve anything, AND everything has been done through God and through Christ

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If anyone remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

5. What are the REWARDS? PRAISE FROM GOD

Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

This is the VERBAL COMMENDATION by the King of the Ages that he is PLEASED with your work, that it has brought him JOY

God expresses this pleasure in WORDS OF PRAISE, as Paul says:

1 Corinthians 4:5 At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Notice also that God invites the servant to ENTER INTO HIS JOY... I think this is the essence of the rewards: a SHARED EXPERIENCE of joy with God over SPECIFIC ACTIONS of service rendered to him

What actions will he praise?? Everything done FOR THE GLORY OF GOD... by FAITH IN CHRIST... in OBEDIENCE to his Word... with a LOVING DEMEANOR

6. So, when Jonathan Edwards said he wanted to OBTAIN as much heavenly happiness as he could, that was 100% nestled within his relationship with God... I WANT GOD TO BE AS PLEASED WITH MY LIFE AND MY MINISTRY AS POSSIBLE! I want him to be pleased with every single moment of my life...

B. Some Saints Will Display More Glory Than Others

1. We will all be glorious in our resurrection bodies... the body that is raised is raised IN GLORY

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

2. But Paul also said this:

1 Corinthians 15:41-42 ... star differs from star in glory. So it will be with the resurrection of the dead.

Not every star shines equally brightly in the night sky...

3. So, we will all be with the resurrection... some people will shine more brightly than others and be adorned with more symbols of their glory than others

C. Some Saints Will Enjoy More Authority Than Others

1. The Twenty four elders in Revelation 4 sat on TWELVE THRONES and had crowns on their heads... these are symbols of authority
2. In the New Heaven and New Earth, Jesus will be King over lesser Kings and Lord over lesser lords
3. Their submission to God and to Christ is clear, because in Revelation 4, they cast their crowns down before the throne of God
4. This is also clear based on this interaction Jesus had with James, John and their mother

Matthew 20:20-23 *She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." ²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. ²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."*

5. On what basis are these positions of honor and authority given
 - a. SUFFERING: drinking from Christ's cup
 - b. SERVICE

Matthew 20:24-28 *When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

6. The saints who **SUFFERED** the **MOST** in **SERVICE** to Christ and his people will be **REWARDED** the most with positions of honor in Christ's Kingdom

D. Some Saints May Enjoy More of God Than Others

1. This is the most questionable of Edwards's conception of heaven

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Some people will have a **LARGER MEASURE** for heavenly joy

2. Edwards said this in his sermon on heaven entitled, "Heaven is a World of Love"

"Every vessel that is cast into this **OCEAN** of happiness is completely full, though there are some vessels far larger than others. And there is **NO HEAVENLY ENVY**, for each saint in heaven will be perfect in love."

In other words, **EVERY SAINT IN HEAVEN WILL BE PERFECTLY HAPPY, BUT NOT EQUALLY HAPPY.**

"All shall have as much love as they desire, and as great manifestations of love as they can bear; and so all shall be fully satisfied; and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no reason for envy."

Each person will have as much **LOVE AS THEY DESIRE**... everyone will eat of God's glory and be fully satisfied... but some people will have larger appetites than others, larger capacity to take in and appreciate the glory and beauty and perfection of God than others

So... **THIS IS A CALL FOR HEAVENLY AMBITION!!**

V. How Much Land Does a Man Need?

- A. Amazing Short Story Written in 1886 by Leo Tolstoy, entitled "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

James Joyce wrote to his daughter that it is “the greatest story that the literature of the world knows”

B. Tolstoy wrote it as a warning against earthly GREED... a consuming desire for earthly wealth that destroys the soul

C. I related this story in a sermon on Christ’s warning:

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?

Tolstoy’s tale focused on a greedy peasant farmer named Pahom who was never satisfied with the amount of land he owned. He heard that the Bashkir people across the far eastern mountains were selling huge tracts of land for very little money. He travelled the hundreds of miles to get there, and when he arrived he met with the chief of the Bashkirs and drank tea with him. He told the chief that he wanted to buy some of their rich beautiful land. The chief agreed readily.

“And what will be the price?” asked Pahom.

“Our price is always the same: one thousand rubles a day.”

Pahom did not understand. “A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?”

“We do not know how to reckon it out,” said the Chief. “We sell it by the day. As much as you can go around on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand rubles a day.”

Pahom was surprised. “But in a day you can get round a large tract of land,” he said.

The Chief laughed. “It will all be yours! But there is one condition: If you don't return on the same day to the spot where you started, your money is lost.”

Pahom agreed with secret delight. He figured he could get around 35 miles of land in a day. He asked how he would mark the land he

walked around; the chief said he should take a spade and dig holes and pile up the sod to mark his new territory.

The next day before sunrise, Pahom arose and went to the top of a high hill where he could see all around him, the fertile land that was beckoning him to stake out his claim. The chief and many of the tribespeople were there to see him off. Just as the sun rose, the chief threw down his cap on the ground to mark the spot to which he MUST return before sundown... and Pahom was off quickly!

He walked due east for several hours, and the further he travelled, the better the land looked to him. Finally, he realized he needed to make his first turn. He dug a hole with his spade at the easternmost extremity of his land, then turned north. He walked until the sun was straight over his head and he was sweating from the effort of the hike. He wanted to rest for lunch, but he dared not, or he might lose some land or all his money by not returning back before sundown. So, he dug his second hole in the ground, having completed two legs of his square. He began to realize, "I have made the sides of the square too long. I better make the third leg shorter or I will lose it all." Struggling intensely now under the heat, Pahom pressed on making the third leg of his square journey. By now, he was exhausted and the sun was dangerously low, heading toward the horizon. "I better travel straight back to the Bashkir chief immediately or I will lose all my land and my money as well. Pahom grew hotter and hotter under the weight of his cloak, hat, and equipment. He began throwing it off, running faster and faster in a race with the sun. Finally, he could see in the hazy distance the hill where he had begun his journey in the morning, with the Bashkirs waiting for him. He broke into a full run, because the sun was almost down. Pahom began to despair, thinking "I have been much too greedy and have ruined everything!" His heart was beating with pressure like under hammer blows, his legs felt like they belonged to someone else... his breath was fevered, and Pahom began to fear that he would die under the strain of trying to return on time.

Pahom was running as hard as his exhausted body would allow him.

The Bashkir chief and all his people were laughing uproariously at his frenzied exertions to complete his circuit before the large orange ball of the sun disappeared below the horizon. Pahom made one final great effort, running up the hill and lunging for the finish line. The chief exploded in laughter, and commended Pahom: "What a fine fellow! He has gained much land!!" But Pahom had a small trickle of blood running down from his mouth, and as his servant tried to rouse him, it was clear: Pahom was dead! Pahom's servant picked up his spade and buried him with it... in the end, six feet from his head to his heels was all the Bashkir land that Pahom needed.

NOW... as I said, Tolstoy intended the story to be a stern warning about worldly ambition, and that's how I used it in that sermon

BUT about two months ago, as I was contemplating the idea of storing up treasure in heaven, and thought about Edwards's resolution, this story came back to mind

Suddenly it occurred to me that I should approach my brief time on earth like Pahom approached his one day of accumulating land... he was relentless, pushing himself to the max, seeking to gain as much earthly territory as he possibly could

Edwards wanted to do the same thing to obtain his HEAVENLY PORTION

Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.

D. Many Christians Approach Spiritual Life the Exact OPPOSITE Way

Instead of being like Pahom, taking off at the drop of the hat and pressing hard and with relentless zeal to acquire as much heavenly joy as they can, the pace is a lot more relaxed, even lethargic

These spiritual Pahoms bring a **Lay-Z-Boy** recliner to the top of the Bashkir hill and lay down on it... when the chief's hat drops, they stretch and yawn and watch the sunrise. Round about 9:45 in the morning, they slowly get up and begin sauntering down the hill at a very slow pace. By 10:30, they dig their first hole with the spade; long before noon, they have dug their second hole, they dig their third before 2 in the afternoon, and they slowly ascend the hill and retake their spot on the couch by 3:30. They then enjoy the rest of the daylight in comfort and ease, satisfied with the one acre plot of heavenly joy they have carved for themselves.

So, I want to ask a different question... Not "How much land does a man need?" but ...

VI. How Much Heaven Do You Want?

- A. A Call to Heavenly Ambition... to RUN THE RACE MARKED OUT
- B. A Call to Store Up Heavenly Treasure
- C. A Call to Redeem the Time, because the days are evil and O SO BRIEF
- D. A Call to Do Daily Good Works for the Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Simple everyday life can be claimed and redeemed for the glory of God. You CAN live an apparently normal day here in America and store up treasure every moment, by praying without ceasing for missions or for the spiritual vitality of your local church while you wash dishes or make a bed or mow a lawn

BUT I really believe that is NOT ENOUGH!!!

- E. A Call to Imitate Paul's Relentless RUNNING

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize

F. A Call to Choose Your Path of True Greatness

In the 1981 movie "Chariots of Fire," the Master of King's College in Oxford, 1919, used the sober image of the list of Oxford students who died in World War I to motivate the new freshman class:

"Let me exhort you. Examine yourselves. Let each of you discover where your true chance of greatness lies. For their sakes, for the sake of your college and your country, seize this chance. Rejoice in it! And let no power or persuasion deter you in your task."

What GREAT THING could God be calling you to do? What are you AMBITIOUS for??

Romans 15:20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Paul says he had an AMBITION... amazing Greek word is literally "to love honor" ... to pursue a lofty goal for the HONOR that would come from achieving it

Paul's relentless drive to push the gospel boundary out further and further was unmatched in church history...

SURELY it was for the glory of Christ that he did it; but Romans 15:20 speaks of Paul's own love of honor

WHAT IS YOURS??? What are you ambitious for with a godly ambition?

Maybe it IS missions! Maybe some of you YOUNG PEOPLE will be called out to take the gospel to one of the 400 unreached

unengaged people groups listed on IMB.org that has literally no witness of any kind

Maybe God will lead you to plant a church in a North American city, and that will take every ounce of your spiritual strength for the next three decades

Maybe God will lead you to revitalize a dying church, to see it move from lethargy and stagnation to a vibrant and powerful ministry in that community

Maybe some of you have academic and writing gifts, like Jonathan Edwards did, and you will write some great book that will help thousands

Maybe God will lead you to a TENTMAKING ministry in which you use business as mission to reach a closed country where they will never allow missionaries in, but they will allow Christian entrepreneurs to start flourishing businesses that employ thousands of nationals

ON THE OTHER HAND, many of you will be called to a different AMBITION:

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Your ambition will be to raise your children in the NURTURE AND ADMONITION of the Lord, to be active in ministries here at FBC and in Durham... workplace evangelism, neighborhood outreaches, health fair, prayer meetings... in addition to your secret acts of godliness – private prayer times for missions, money given sacrificially – like the widow's copper coins, giving more sacrificially than anyone ever knew about

And in personal holiness, growing more and more godly in Christ – secretly fasting, memorizing scripture, putting sin to death by the

Spirit, resisting the world more powerfully than you ever have before... and living a HEAVENLY LIFE in this American setting

My imagination will only go so far... but GOD could lay a God-sized burden on your heart that will press you every moment of your life

HOW MUCH HEAVEN DO YOU WANT?