

Title: Are We There Yet?

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Scripture: [John 17:1-8](#)

Text: [Revelation 21:1-6](#)

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I'd like to ask every parent who is in the room, whether your child is in your home and you are currently doing the business of raising them, or if they are long gone from your home, every parent, currently in active duty or veteran of the campaign, a question. By a show of hands, did your son or daughter ever ask the question, "Are

we there yet?" It looks like most of the parents in the room have heard that question.

Let me ask the question again, another way. I'd like to ask everyone in this room who was ever a child, which means everyone in the room because I'm pretty sure that there has never been someone born as a grown-up. I'd like to ask everyone in this room that was ever a kid, by show of hands, did you ever ask, "Are we there yet?" Of course, you did.

Every parent has heard it. Every kid has said it. And in fact, every human feels it. Have you ever thought, ever asked, ever wanted to know, "Are we there yet?"

Are we there yet? We spend much of our time trying to get somewhere else. Part of this is survival. We have to be goal-oriented to find food, pay the bills, build a life. It's part of raising children. Think about that the next time when you hear, "Are we there yet?" Raising kids is a "are we there yet" experience. Education and the graduations that many of you are attending with children and family is a "are we there yet" experience. "Are we there yet" is a way that we focus on the future.

But it is more than that. Something in us is waiting. For what, we do not know. It's larger than arriving at the destination of a vacation or a milestone in a career. It's more than just wanting to discover financial freedom or find stability in health. It's something different, something larger, something final. In the Christian faith, the deepest and most mysterious expression of

the question, "Are we there yet" is found in a word, "eternity." Are we there yet? No, not yet at least not the way we like to think of eternity.

Ask anybody about what heaven looks like, and we have some wonderful, fanciful images. Or great stories like the one someone reminded me this week after I asked, "What does heaven look like?" What's your picture of eternity? He said, "An 85-year-old couple died in a car crash after having been married almost 60 years. They had been in good health the last ten years mainly due to the wife's interest in health food. When they reached the pearly gates, St. Peter took them to their mansion, which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite and Jacuzzi. As they marveled at it all, the old man asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. "It's free," Peter replied, "this is heaven." Next, they went out back to survey the championship golf course that backed up to the home. They would have golfing privileges every day, and each week the course changed to a new one representing the great golf courses on earth. The old man asked, "What are the green fees?" Peter replied, "This is heaven, you play for free." Next, they went to the clubhouse and saw the lavish buffet lunch with the cuisines of the world laid out. "How much to eat?" asked the old man. "Don't you understand yet? This is heaven, it is free!" Peter replied with some exasperation. "Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol tables?" the old man asked timidly. Peter lectured, "That's the best part! You can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is heaven."

With that the old man went into a fit of anger, throwing down his hat, stomping on it, and screaming wildly. Peter and the man's wife both tried to calm him down, asking him what was wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "This is all your fault. If it weren't for that lousy diet you made me eat, I could have been here ten years ago!"¹

Are we there yet? No, not there but I'm not sure, even with the fanciful stories about gold streets and pearly gates, dreams about fields of dreams and endless smorgasbords, none of us want to rush to into eternity. We may long for it, ache for, even if we aren't in any hurry to get there.

It a really funny story but one which actually doesn't reflect what Jesus came to teach about eternity. For Jesus, the question "are we there yet?" is answered in a completely different way than we answer it. For Jesus, eternal life is not just a destination that lasts forever. It is a life in which God lives; it is the kind of life one has in Christ. This means that eternal life isn't just about the future. We can have it now. It's not just about there. We can have it here.²

This is the basic assumption that Jesus makes, his thesis statement, and all of the gospels summarize this position. Mark says: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15) Luke says the same thing, that Jesus "...went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." A little later Jesus sends out his disciples to preach the same thing, to proclaim the kingdom of God. When he is resurrected, he appears to his disciples and Acts says: "...appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3) The kingdom is not just there; it begins here. That's Jesus' main message. The kingdom of God has drawn near.

But of course, that's not the way we've come to think about Jesus message. Over the centuries, in countless churches, slowly but surely following Jesus became about meeting the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven. It was about getting into the kingdom rather than experiencing the kingdom, it's about what you think and believe, not what you discover and practice. It makes Christians into people who are on a journey to a final destination and if you believe the right things, have the right answers, then you get into heaven when you die.

It's like that great theological movie and a number of you may remember watching, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. If you remember the movie, King Arthur and three of his knights are trying to get into the castle where the Holy Grail is. Lying between them and the castle is a bottomless abyss and a bridge upon which stands an old bridgekeeper. In order to gain passage, you have to answer three questions. If you get one wrong, you get cast down into the abyss. So the first knight comes up, and the bridgekeeper asks, "What's your name, what's your quest, what's your favorite color?" The first knight answered, "Lancelot, of Camelot, the Holy Grail and blue." He gets to cross the bridge. The next knight comes up and the bridgekeeper asks, "What's your name, what's your quest?" The knight answers. "Robin, the Holy Grail." Then the bridgekeeper asks, "What's the capital of Assyria?" Robin answers, "What? I don't know. Nobody knows THAT! AAAAARRRRRGGGGHHH!" He is cast into the abyss.

Then, King Arthur comes. "I'm Arthur, I seek the Holy Grail" and the bridgekeeper says, "What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?" Arthur replies after a brief pause, "What do you mean, an African or a European swallow?" The bridge keeper says confusedly, "Well...I don't know...AAAAARRRRGGGGGHHH!!!" and he is cast into the abyss. ³

Let's face it. This is how many people today think about eternity. They've reduced the gospel to the idea that when you die, there will be this castle, the good place and there will be the abyss, the bad place and getting in is knowing the right answer so that God will allow us to cross the bridge. The problem is, Jesus doesn't talk about salvation that way. He doesn't say, "I've come to give you the answers to get into heaven." He never says, "Here are the minimal expectations for getting in." He doesn't talk about eternal life that way. In fact, Jesus defines eternal life only once, but he does it with great precision, and in a way that has been largely lost in our day: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal Life = Knowing God.⁴

This is what Jesus came to proclaim. Please note that Jesus didn't say, "know about you." He says, know you. There is a difference in knowing about someone and knowing someone. Jesus is saying here and says elsewhere, "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:7). He says that when he is talking about our place which he goes to prepare. If knowing God is eternal life and we know and see God by knowing Jesus, then, eternity is available here and now. The kingdom of God is at hand. It starts by grace through Jesus. Or as Dallas Willard so beautifully wrote, "Eternal life in the individual does not begin after death, but at the point where God touches the individual with redeeming grace and draws them into a life interactive with himself and his kingdom."⁵

It begins with a relationship with Jesus because he said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 21:6b) That famous passage, read so often at funeral and memorial services, gives us hope in an eternal home. John, of Patmos, is the writer. He is the victim of war, an exile, a prisoner in a hopeless situation. His world has collapsed. The capital of his nation, Jerusalem, is gone, utterly destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. He's an old man, in a prison cave with only a small opening through which he can breathe fresh air and see a slice of brilliant blue sky and sea.

John knew that Christians were being arrested, executed, or imprisoned as traitors to the Roman state. So he wanted to write a letter of encouragement to his friends and fellow believers under persecution. He looked out that tiny opening in his prison cell, saw the sky, the sea, and wrote striking words that somehow were smuggled out of his prison and given to the world:

"I saw a new heaven and new earth...the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.... a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among mortals.... He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and death will be no more.'" (Revelations 21: 1-4)

It's a wonderful vision, of something in the future. It includes the gift of grace offered by Jesus. It offers hope that death will be no more and we will dwell with God forever. But John is able to have this vision because he knows that eternity has already started because, Jesus is the alpha, not just the omega, he's the beginning, not just the end. Jesus came to show us, teach us, offer us the kingdom because Jesus was the kingdom bearer. He ushered in the kingdom, the beginning of eternity.

It's why Jesus was constantly teaching about the kingdom of God. What should I compare to the kingdom of God? It's like a mustard seed, it starts small in you and grows into something big. It's why when Jesus taught us to pray, he said, "Father, who art in heaven...thy kingdom come...thy will be done." Heaven come down here. May you, God, who is up there, come down here.

Salvation isn't about getting you into heaven; it's about getting heaven into you. It's not about relocation; it's about transformation. It's not about what God wants to do to you; it's about what God wants to do in you. It's about allowing Jesus' Kingdom to permeate your life one moment, one choice at a time.⁶ It's about coming down out of heaven and coming into our lives. Jesus was the beginning.

Are we there yet? It's hard to say yes when we look around and see the suffering of war, of violence, of hunger. It's hard to say yes when our lives are filled with sin when we are greedy and selfish, apathetic and cold.

But every now and then, it happens. We begin to see it. The kingdom of God is at hand when somebody has some resources and invests in ministry, when somebody gets hurt and they end up forgiving somebody when love triumphs over hate, when a barrier is broken, when reconciliation takes place and when peace is discovered. When any of those things take place, we can suddenly see up-there coming down here, we see a new heaven and earth coming. It's just a glimpse but enough to say to the question, "Are we there yet?" Maybe not yet but, we are getting there.

This is why Jesus came. He is the beginning of eternity, not just the end. He didn't come to share with you the minimal requirements for getting into heaven when you die. He came to share with you the Good News that you can have it now. All you have to do is revise your plans for living so that love him, follow him, and know Jesus and you will experience eternal life.

It's his promise and a power for living with hope with the question, Are we there yet."

¹ Daniels, David. The Long Tomorrow. Retrieved by subscription @ preachingtoday.com.

² Ortberg, John. (pp. 2-3).

³ https://www.intriguing.com/mp/_scripts/bridge.php

⁴ Ortberg, John. (p. 4).

⁵ Willard, Dallas. Renewing the Christianity Mind. Tyndale, 307.

⁶ Ortberg, John. (pp. 33-34).