

Heaven pt 2 09-01-02

Revelation 21:8-22:6

Last week we took a look at the description John gave us, including God's own description, about that place we call heaven. What an introduction to the place where we will spend eternity! We thought on the wonder of being home, of having every tear wiped away as we see Jesus face to face. We thought of the wonder of the analogy of being His bride and how He is preparing us to be the heavenly city. Ultimately we say again with the Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 2:9(NIV) *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"*--

But the following verse says: *10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*

We get a glimpse in the Spirit what it will be like when every brother and sister in Christ is overflowing with the fruits of the Spirit. We long for that place and with Abraham we seek the city with foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. We've seen too much of man's ways. They are full of flaws, riddled with problems. Our text begins with a warning of who will not enter heaven, but instead, will be **cast** in the lake of fire.

Rev. 21:8 (NIV) *8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

First we have a warning of who will not be in that city of God. You might think that because you do none of these vile acts **that** you aren't in this category. The key word here is 'unbelievers'. We were all born into this category. We all were once listed in this group. (1 Cor. 6:9-11) But we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Who does John mean when he says 'all liars'? Certainly everyone has lied at one time or another. Let's use John's own definition: 1 John 2:22 (NIV) *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son.* And in case you need more confirmation check out 1 John 5:10 (NIV) *Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.*

God spoke from heaven and said, "This is my Son. Hear Him!" Moses warned us that God was going to raise up a prophet like him and to that prophet we must listen. If we don't believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior we are calling God a liar. That makes us a liar. That makes us deserving of judgement. Theologian D A Carson clarifies the need for hell. "Hell is not a place where people are consigned because they were pretty good blokes, but they just didn't believe the right stuff. They're consigned there, first and foremost, because they defy their Maker and want to be the center of the universe. Hell is not filled with people who have already repented; only God isn't gentle enough or good enough to let them out. It's filled with people who, for all eternity, still want to be the center of the universe and who persist in their God-defying rebellion.

Commented [Q1]: 9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
1 Cor. 6:9-11 (NIV)

What is God to do? If He says it doesn't matter to Him, then God is no longer a God to be admired. He's either amoral or positively creepy. For Him to act in any other way in the face of such blatant defiance would be to reduce God Himself."

Quite a contrast with the heavenly home John has been writing about where people are full of sacrificial love. The next verses return to the description of heaven. Rev. 21:9-11 (NIV) *9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

The angel took John up to a high **vantage point** to see the city, the bride, as it touches down upon the earth. Notice again that the bride and the city are the same thing. We were in that third heaven with God and then He sends us to the earth. The third heaven will be moved to an earthly center since God will inhabit His city. That is why it shines with the glory of God. We will be shining too! We will be beholding His glory and like Moses' face, we too are going to shine.

John doesn't have words to describe what He is seeing so he keeps saying, "It looks like this, and that looks like that." What else can you do but make comparisons with something you can relate to. In verses 22,23 John describes this in more detail: Rev. 21:22-23 (NIV) *22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*

The LORD Himself is the temple and the light of the city. That word for temple is the word used for the Holy of Holies. This was the place where the priest entered once year with fear and trembling, to meet with God and sprinkle the blood of atonement. When this day comes we will live in the Holy of Holies, in God's presence. Since everything in **the** city is transparent the light of God emanates from the heavenly city. The city and the surrounding land are lit by the glory of God. The Lamb is the lamp to everyone there. Those of us in the city will constantly be bathed in His light. There is no darkness there or anything associated with darkness.

Rev. 21:12-13 (NIV) *12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.*

There is a wall around the heavenly city. It is great and high, and 200 feet thick according to verse 17. What a wall! Nothing that isn't meant to be in there will ever get in. You can rest assured. Every one of the four walls has three gates. An angel is posted at each gate. Though the gates are always open, there is nothing that will get by those angels that should not be in the city. Angelic security is the best kind. Rev. 21:27 (NIV) *27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

The only way in is to have your name written in the Lamb's book of life. The only way to get your name entered there is to receive what Jesus did for you.

Each of those gates is always open. In the ancient world the gates were closed at night when an enemy might sneak in passed the guards. There is no night so there is no need to close them. Each gate is a giant pearl. That was one big oyster! You know how a pearl is formed from the irritation of a grain of sand, and the creature coats it with coat after coat of pearl. Vernon McGee wrote that the church is the pearl of great price. Christ gave all to purchase us. We were an irritation – rebels against God, but He coated us with Himself again and again until there was only the pure white pearl. We were a little sharp grain of sand in the Savior's side, but He coated us until all that could be seen was Jesus. Every time we see the gates we are reminded of His faithfulness to cover us and remove the irritation that we were once.

On each gate are the names of three tribes. While the Jews were wandering in the wilderness they camped with three tribes on each side of the tabernacle as prescribed by the LORD. The tabernacle was in the center and everyone was as close to it as possible. Each tribe camped facing the place where God dwelt among them. Some commentators suggest that this means only Jews are in the city. We've already seen that all overcomers are the same. They are believers. The Apostle said there are no longer two groups, Jew and Gentile but one new man. A Jew is one inwardly and circumcision **is** of the heart. Do the tribes represent something spiritual or a calling? I don't know the answer, but the names are there for a reason.

Now we come to the dimensions of the city. This is incredible. Rev. 21:16 (NIV) *16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.* The city is 1500 miles long, wide and high. If it had 20 billion people, each person would have 75 square acres with space left over for public areas! That is huge! The original Holy of holies was 15 cubits by 15 cubits by 15 cubits. The proportions are the same, but there is room for many more people to enter in because the saints through the ages have been added to the city.

Rev. 21:24 (NIV) *24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.* To the surprise of many, the world will be inhabited. The light of the world will shine from the city. The people of the world will come to the city with offerings. The kings that rule over the nations of the world bring their splendor to the King of kings.

Rev. 22:1-2 (NIV) *1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

Out from under the throne of God comes the river of life. Ezekiel describes this same river. It sounds like it flows out to fill the Dead Sea bringing life wherever it goes. I love the water. When I read about no more sea I was a little discouraged, but then I got to this river. The thing I love about the ocean is all the beautiful diversity of life. Imagine what will be living in this river that brings life wherever it flows! Ezekiel says swarms of living creatures.

On each side of **the** river is the tree of life. You remember man was banished from **eating the** fruit of this tree in the Garden because of sin. In a corrupt state, to live forever would be more of a curse than a blessing. There in our heavenly condition, transformed into Christ's likeness we will freely eat of the fruit. **There is** nothing like fresh fruit right off the tree. We will be able to enjoy eating in our new bodies. Jesus ate with his disciples after the resurrection. I think this fruit has a lot more than just flavor. It must be deeply significant of fruitfulness and the fruits of the Spirit. Every month will have a new harvest. The nations will be asking for the leaves, for they bring healing to them.

Rev. 22:3 (NIV) 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

The curse of sin will be gone with the old earth. This new earth will have no sign of it at all. We saw last week how the scars of the old sin sick world and our lives damaged by sin will not even be remembered. The idea is repeated here because it should encourage us. Pain and suffering and the destructiveness of sin will be no more.

Here in this verse we find out what we are doing in eternity. We are serving God. Now to some that sounds like a bad thing but to those who serve Him now, that sounds like a wonderful thing. Serving God is exciting and fulfilling. It brings great joy and a sense of purpose. I can't think of anything more exciting to do in eternity than to be a servant of God. It is not clear from the text but I would imagine we have something to do with the nations of the world. Another passage says that we will be priests of God and reign with Christ over the nations for 1000 years. (Rev. 20:6) If we needed to know just how we will serve Him it would be written, but that is not yet clearly revealed. He so faithfully rewards us for service in this life and in eternity, we can be sure whatever we do will be rewarding! David tells us in Psalm 16:11 that at God's right hand are pleasures forever. There is quite a contrast here with the self-serving who will be in the Lake of Fire. They would not be happy here because they want everyone to serve them and can't imagine that there is joy in serving the Author of Life and Giver of every good blessing.

Rev. 22:4 (NIV) 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

We will see His face. The blessing that priests spoke to Israel includes these words, "The face of the LORD shining on you". That implies that He looks on them with favor. This will be the ultimate fulfillment of that blessing. We will behold His face and ours will shine with the reflected glory! The slaves of the first century were often marked in their foreheads with the name of their owner. If your owner was an influential person you displayed your forehead proudly. Imagine if you are on errand of the King of kings. No one dare get in your way or hinder you in any way. The name of the King of kings will be on our foreheads. Here again we have the idea that eternity will include assignments from our Lord for we are His servants who proudly display His name on our foreheads. The people of the world chose to have the name or number of the Anti-christ. They served him as lord. We chose instead to have the name of the Sovereign Lord of all.

Rev. 22:5 (NIV) 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Commented [Q2]: 6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.
Rev. 20:6 (KJV)

In 1Thess. 5 the Apostle Paul tells us that we are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of darkness or of the night. We will be in the Eternal Day. Darkness is a time of crime, a time when people do things that they do not wish to be seen or caught doing. There will be none of that. Jesus said people that love the darkness don't wish their acts to be made known because they are not of God. The ones that love light come to the Light. (John 3:19-21) God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1John 1:5)

Another clue as to what we will be doing is found at the end of the verse. We will reign forever. That means there must be others who we reign over. The nations outside the city must be subject to us in some way. I don't understand all this. I just look at the pieces and wonder at what we are soon to experience.

Rev. 22:6 (NIV) *6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."*

In the last chapter God told John to write down for us that the words were trustworthy and true. Here, the angel that is presenting the information tells John again, you can count on these words being fulfilled. The God that has accurately described the future through the prophets, the One with 100% accuracy in His predictions is showing you what will soon happen. You can count on it because He is entirely trustworthy and incapable of a lie. This will happen. We need to hear that because we are bombarded with doubts and fears. Without the promise of God we would despair of life, but oh what a world we have waiting for us.

This week our sister Donna graduated from this life and is now experiencing all these things. She has gone from time to timelessness. She stands in the presence of God and seeing Him face to face she is changed into His likeness. I bet she's munching on some of that fruit right now and maybe wading in that river, marveling at all the life in it. I know she's amazed at the flowers along the shore. Every tear has been wiped away and every scar is gone. Still, she is waiting for something else.

At the end of that great chapter on faith, Hebrews 11, we're told that all those saints of God that died have not yet received what they have been promised. You see, they were all looking for a city that had foundations, something with permanence, and something of eternal value that they would be a part of.

Heb. 11:39-40 (NIV) *39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

The city is all of us, together, perfected, made like unto Jesus. They are waiting for us so that the city can be completed. We are waiting to go to them, to fit into our heavenly home. When every last 'living stone' is assembled and in place, New Jerusalem will descend from heaven dressed as a bride adorned for her husband. We together with them will be made perfect. I can only imagine...

Commented [Q3]: 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.
20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.
21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."
John 3:19-21 (NIV)

Commented [Q4]: 5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:5 (NIV)