

## Heaven Speaks Of...

It's good to be back in service. Two weeks ago I was home sick with covid and then I shared it with Paula. We had already planned a week away and so we took that time to recoup and now we are back and feeling better. I understand all the staff is leaving this week on spring break so it appears I got better and got home just in time! Since I've missed a couple of Sundays, I want to go back to Revelation 21 and talk about heaven and specifically what John's vision suggests to us about the New Jerusalem, this heavenly city. The last time I preached I pointed out heaven is described as both a city and as a virgin bride. Heaven is perfectly proportioned, i.e. holy and whole and complete in every way. Heaven is light filled and life producing. This morning I want to point out some additional things that John's vision of heaven speaks of.

John writes, **"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband..." Revelation 21:2** If you remember back a few weeks, we talked about Revelation 17 and 18 and the city of Babylon. We pointed out the contrast between Babylon and the new Jerusalem. Both are represented as women and cities. The New Jerusalem is a holy city and a holy, virgin bride, the wife of the Lamb. Babylon is an unholy city, a home for demons and instead of being described as a bride, Babylon is described as a harlot and the mother of prostitutes. Quite the contrast.

The instruction was given from heaven to the people of God living in Babylon, **"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins." Revelation 18:4** The contrast was striking and the command was clear to come out. Remember Babylon represented the world, the empire, the sinful culture around them. If God's people were to come out of Babylon, where were they to go? They needed a home, a city to belong to, a city to head toward and God gives John this vision of another city that would be far beyond compare. "John, tell them about this city. Although it is in the future, it can begin to draw the people of God away from Babylon and toward this promised city!" We can't enter it yet, but with eyes of faith we can see it and by the grace of God we already belong to it. My name is already on the city rolls. It's a city not made with hands. This is what is promised to those who love him and this city speaks of paradise!

**Heaven speaks of Paradise.** This New Jerusalem John saw coming down, it is the paradise we lost and the paradise God restores us to. Ezekiel 28 speaks of the Garden of Eden and describes the precious stones found there on the holy mountain of God. You'll find those

same unique stones in Revelation 21 decorating the foundation of heaven. In the paradise of Genesis you'll find a tree of life and you'll find it again in the paradise that is the New Jerusalem. Richard Bauckham in his book on the theology of the book of Revelation states that the New Jerusalem as paradise "is the natural world in its ideal state, rescued from the destroyers of the earth, reconciled with humanity, filled with the presence of God..." John writes, **"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. It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."** Revelation 21:10-11

Bauckham writes, "when the whole city is said to have the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal, we remember that the glory of God himself is 'like jasper and carnelian' ("there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian... Rev. 4:2-3)...and that the sea of glass before his throne in heaven is translucent like crystal, to reflect his glory. John probably means that the whole city, with its radiant jewels and its translucent gold shines with the reflected glory of God himself."

God gave us a garden in the beginning and in the end he gives us a city and in that new city the blessings of paradise will be restored and God will dwell with us! Heaven speaks of paradise. It's home, it's where we are supposed to be! John continues his description of heaven...

**"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. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Revelation 21:10-14**

When we read John's description of the city with walls and twelve gates and twelve foundation stones, we realize... **Heaven speaks of Permanence.** Much of the Old Testament tells the story of people on the move, in transition, looking for a land, a city, a home. In the book of Genesis, God calls the Patriarch Abraham to leave the land of his birth and go to a land which the Lord said he would show him. God entered into a covenant with Abraham, promising to bless him and his descendants and to give him the land, but Abraham always seemed to be in

transit. He lived in the land but didn't build a city or a permanent dwelling. The writer of Hebrews tells us, **“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.”** Hebrews 11:8-10 Abraham lived as a stranger in the land God was giving him because he was ultimately searching for another home, another place, a permanent home, a city with foundations, built by God. Sounds familiar doesn't it?

Moses led the people of God out of slavery and bondage in Egypt and brought them to the edge of the land God had promised to Abraham and to them. Because of their stubbornness and unbelief, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness, living as nomads in the desert, moving every so often. They must have grown weary of packing their belongings and moving again and again from place to place in the wilderness. Quoting from Hebrews again, speaking of Abraham and his descendants, of Moses and his wilderness wanderers and all of God's people, the writer tells us, **“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”** Hebrews 11:13-16

These Old Testament saints are joined by all of us New Testament believers because we too are looking for another country, another city, a heavenly kingdom, a permanent home. Everything about this world, this life, is transient and temporary, it's fading quickly. It can be over in a moment, suddenly, unexpectedly. This world isn't our home, we are just passing through because we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and we are made for another land.

The Peacemakers are recording a new cd and one of the songs Jeff has written for the new project has this lyric, “This world has never felt like home to me, it's just a stop along the way to eternity. Heaven is where I really want to be, this world has never felt like home to me.”

The city John sees and describes for us, with its massive walls and its twelve gates and its twelve foundation stones, it's a permanent place. No more tents, no more packing up and moving, no more living as aliens and strangers, like foreigners in a strange country. No more living out of suitcases or boxes. Heaven is the home we've never been to but we will know it. It's home. It's where we belong. It's the city, the place he has prepared for us. Heaven speaks of permanence. Home at last! It's where we rest from our labor at the end of the day. It's where we gather with family and loved ones who have gone before, but it's not just a brief visit: Heaven is our permanent home! We've arrived, put your clothes in the closet because when we get to heaven we are home!

**Heaven speaks of Protection.** The passage we read speaks of walls around the city. John's readers understood that walled cities meant guarded cities, they meant places of safety where an enemy couldn't penetrate, where access was controlled and limited. NIV translates the measurement of the wall as 144 cubits thick or some think it means 144 cubits high. 144 cubits is about 200 feet. 200 feet thick or 200 feet high, or perhaps both. Remember verse 12 said the city had "a great, high wall with 12 gates". I think John's point is it's an intensely secure wall and city and the point for us is simply no one is getting into heaven that isn't supposed to be there. No enemy, no tempter, no tormentor, no destroyer or deceiver. Earlier in the chapter John heard a loud voice telling him that in that new city there would be no more death or grieving or crying or pain. Those enemies can't get in. We've had too many funerals in recent days, but death is an enemy that won't ever get inside the walls of heaven! Dottie Rambo wrote a song that said "tears will never stain the streets of that city." Heaven speaks of protection!

It's not only the size and safety of the walls, but John tells us there were twelve gates into the city, three on each side, and at each gate was positioned an angel as a sentry to guard the entrance. You can't scale the walls, but you also can't sneak through the gates. You can't enter by cunning or deception. The walls and the angels at the gates control who enters and John tells us, "**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.**" **Revelation 21:27** Earlier in the chapter John mentioned some of those who won't be allowed entrance and instead would be cast into the lake of fire, the second death. "**...the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars...**" **Revelation 21:8**

We could focus on the list of who can't get in but the important thing to consider is how do we get in? John says **“On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there.” Revelation 21:25.** They don't have to lock the gates at night because the city is permanently safe. Here is the key. This is how we enter in. We make certain our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. How do we do that?

The bible says **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23**

John tells us **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9**

Okay, I admit I've sinned. That means I'm a sinner. What do I do now? In Acts 16, when a Roman jailer asked the Apostle Paul what he needed to do to be saved, Paul said, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” Acts 16:31** Exactly what am I supposed to believe? Paul tells us in Romans 10. **“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Romans 10:9-13**

He will write your name in that book of life if you will turn to him today. Repent of your sins and ask him to forgive you and cleanse you. Understand, you can't earn his salvation, it is a gift he gives to you when you turn to him. **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 1:8-9**

**“...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” Titus 3:5** Heaven speaks of permanence and protection. It is home for all whose name is written in the Lamb's book of life. Those gates are never closed, they are open to you if you will come to him today! You don't want to miss heaven but now is the time to prepare. Now is the time to turn to the Lord. I invite you to open your heart and life to him today! Call on him while you can and make him Savior and Lord.