

## Heaven Speaks Of... Part 2

We've been at this study of Revelation for some time now and we are going to finish it up next Sunday. This morning I want to look again at what John's vision says to us about heaven. Once more, look with me at Revelation 21. John writes, **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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.'"** Revelation 21:1-4

We said last week that John's description of **Heaven speaks of paradise**. The paradise that was lost to us in the Garden of Eden is restored to us, or rather we could say we are restored to it. This time paradise is in the form and design of a city, a city Richard Bauckham said, that has been "rescued from the destroyers of the earth...filled with the presence of God". The heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, is described as both a glorious city and as a woman, a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. It is in stark contrast to Babylon, a, earthly city of abominations, described as a harlot and the mother of prostitutes.

We said heaven speaks of paradise and **Heaven speaks of permanence**. The bible says we, the people of God, are in search of a city of permanence, a city with foundations and gates, a city whose architect, designer, builder and maker is God himself. That's what we find in Revelation 21. No longer living as aliens and foreigners, no more living in tents like the Old Testament people of God, no longer wandering in a wilderness, we will be home. Home where we rest from our labor. Home where we gather with family and friends who have gone before us. Home where we dwell forever with our Heavenly Father. If you are tired of running, tired of never belonging, never feeling at home, don't miss heaven, Heaven is our eternal, permanent home.

Finally, we said **Heaven speaks of protection**. We talked about the great walls of the new Jerusalem and the twelve gates in the walls, three on each side. Heaven is protected. Nothing impure will ever enter it. Sinners, the unbelieving, the vile and immoral and violent, murderers and liars will never get in to heaven. You can't sneak in, you can't scale the walls nor

tunnel under them. You can only enter through the gate and Jesus is the gate. It is only through faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord that you can enter the gates of heaven. Paradise, permanence and protection.

I want to add a couple of other things that heaven speaks of that are found in those verses we read and that also begin with the letter p. First of all, **Heaven speaks of preparation.** John said the city was prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. John is letting us know there is nothing slipshod, nothing just thrown together about heaven. It's been prepared as a bride dressed and prepared for her husband.

At the wedding rehearsal I always ask, "Does everyone in the wedding party know what time they are supposed to be at the church the day of the wedding?" The guys are always thinking "Starts at 6:00, we should be there, what 5:15? 5:30?" And the women say, "We need to meet at church no later than 9:00 a.m. The hairdressers will be here at 9:30 and then the team that's coming to do makeup and nails will be here at 1:00 and then the videographer will be filming." It's a whole level of preparation the bride is involved in the groom knows nothing about. It would only confuse him. He just knows she looks really pretty when she walks down the aisle. If the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride for her husband, we are talking about major preparation.

Jesus said, "**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**" **John 14:1-3** Jesus is preparing a place for us, a home for us, a room for us in his Father's house, in that New Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the people of God longing for and seeking for a country of their own, a place to belong, a place of permanence and protection. He states, "**...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 11:16**

He has prepared a place, a city for us. We try to picture it based on what John attempts to describe in Revelation 21 but it is beyond description. It is not made by hands. God built it. Jesus has been preparing it for the past 2,000 years. Imagine? That's all we can do. The scripture says, "**No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.**" **1 Corinthians 2:9-10** We

can't see it, but we sense something in our spirit, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, that heavenly city is where we are supposed to be. Heaven speaks of a prepared place and we need to be prepared to go there someday! That preparation comes by repenting of your sins and placing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. You don't want to miss heaven.

**Heaven speaks of people.** We just read from chapter 21, **“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.’” Revelation 21:3** Heaven and the new Jerusalem is not just a place, it is people; a city, a country, an eternal home for God's people. Both the history of Israel and the church, the history of the Old and New Testaments find their fulfillment and completion in the people of the New Jerusalem. Everything about Heaven speaks of God's people. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on its gates. The names of the twelve apostles are written on its foundations. The names of all of those redeemed by the blood of Christ are written in the Lamb's book of life. John says God will make his dwelling with his people. He will live with them and in every sense of the word make his people his very own. Heaven isn't just a place we are going to live in, it is the people we are going to be with. I've mentioned before of being at the hospital years ago with Kathryn Sparkman. One of her daughters was very ill and about to die and Sis. Sparkman looked at me and said “Phil, heaven won't be a strange place.” It won't be because it's home. It's our home. God's people, my people, are there, waiting on me, waiting on us to join them!

The writer of Hebrews reminds us we are “surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.” The saints of God, all those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will be there, gathered in his presence, rejoicing before his throne. John spoke of every creature in heaven and on earth, all of God's people singing “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever.” Revelation 5:13. John testifies, **“...there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.’”** **Revelation 7:9-10.** It's all about the people of God, with God, with the Lamb, and we will never be parted or separated again. What a day that will be!

**Heaven speaks of God's presence.** Above every other outstanding quality and description of heaven, the most important and glorious characteristic is God's presence. We've quoted the Scripture a couple of times now. **"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.' Revelation 21:3** He will live with them, with us. He is present with us now by his Holy Spirit but in heaven, He is present in a way we can't begin to comprehend or understand. Heaven, the new Jerusalem is filled with the glory of God. His presence with us is deeply personal, intimate. When you stop to think of the interaction of God throughout Revelation, often it has been through angels or some other intermediary. John would say, "I heard a voice from heaven" or "the angel said" or "a man showed me" "or a voice from the throne said". But in the New Jerusalem, in heaven where God's glory and presence fills and permeates the place, John says, "God himself will be with them and be their God." **"He will wipe every tear from their eyes." Revelation 21:4.** How personal is that? God himself wipes the tears from our face and our eyes and does away with the source of pain and tears. That is what it means for God to be present in our lives in heaven!

Consider something else about this heavenly city. Remember John described it as a cube, 1,500 miles high, wide and long. It was a cube because it's fashioned like the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle or the Temple in Jerusalem. If you remember, the temple in Jerusalem had a unique design. An outer court, then the holy place and then the holy of holies. The city is designed and built this way to show us that all of the New Jerusalem is a holy of holies.

In Sunday School our youth have been studying the temple and have been constructing replicas of the objects in the temple. In the outer court was the brazen altar or altar of sacrifice and the bronze laver. Through the curtain you step into the holy place where there was the golden lampstand, the table of show bread and the altar of incense. The priests could come and go in both of those areas but the last area, the holy of holies, the area shaped like a cube, only the high priest was allowed entrance into it and that was only one day out of the year, the day of atonement. Inside the holy of holies was only one thing, only one item, the ark of the covenant. The covering or top of this ark was called the mercy seat. It was here the glory of God would be manifested and a very interesting thing is there was no windows, no light, no lamp or lampstand in the holy of holies. The only light in that room was from the glory of God as his presence would fill the room. If God's presence wasn't there, there was only darkness.

Now look at this heavenly city. John writes, **“I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 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.” Revelation 21:22-23** Do you see this? The whole city of the New Jerusalem is a holy of holies and God’s immediate presence fills it. In place of a temple, heaven has the unlimited, unrestricted presence of God and the Lamb. A lamp isn’t needed, nor is the sun or the moon, for the glory of God gives it light. The Lamb is the light!

Listen, quoting from Richard Bauckham’s book on the theology of Revelation, “In the earthly temple in Jerusalem the high priest, once a year only, wore the sacred name of God on his forehead and entered God’s immediate presence in the holy of holies. In the New Jerusalem, which is God’s eternal holy of holies, all will enjoy this immediacy without interruption. But nothing expresses this immediacy more evocatively than the words ‘they shall see his face’ (Rev. 22:4).” **“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” Revelation 22:4**

The high priest alone could go into the holy of holies and only one day out of the year. But in the New Jerusalem which is the ultimate holy of holies, all of God’s people have unlimited access. And it’s not just to behold the light of his glory and his holiness, but we will see his face. John wrote in 1 John 3:2 “we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.” We will see his face and we will be like him. His name, his covenant name that the Jews would not speak, his name will be on our forehead. Not a mark of the beast but the name of God, the mark of the Lamb of God. We will live in his presence and His glory will permeate everything.

I want you to think of the heart of this for a final moment. We are going to live in this glorious, heavenly holy of holies where there is no sun or moon or other lamp because he alone is all the light we will need. He is everything. We used to sing, “He’s all I need.” Is he all you need? In view of heaven, can you live now with Jesus as your only light? Can you live with only his presence? Nothing else? He wants to be our everything. That’s how it will be in heaven, living in his all sufficiency, but we ought to start living that way now, depending upon him, trusting in him, relying upon him, spending time in his presence. We don’t need anything else to prop up our ego, to satisfy our longing. Jesus alone is our light, our salvation. He is all we need, now and forever.

How about you? For eternity he will be all we need, but is he all you need right now? Have you surrendered your heart and life to him completely? It’s a little bit of heaven on earth!