

Text: Revelation 21:1-21

Title: “Heaven ... Our Forever Home”

INTRODUCTION

Today I'm picking up with the series, “Heaven ... Really?” So please open your Bibles with me to Revelation 21:1. Jesus Christ appeared to the Apostle John and revealed or unveiled truths about time and eternity. And Jesus speaks through John to people who needed to know how to live victoriously in the midst of suffering ... and how to keep their eyes fixed on heaven. Follow along as I read from Revelation 21:1-5 about “Heaven ... Our Forever Home.”

The Bible tells us that God's great redemptive activity doesn't end with us getting saved. The Bible tells us that God's great redemptive activity will come to a glorious climax one day when we see what John saw in...

Revelation 21:1 (NIV) - 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.

ILLUSTRATION – I like to think of the earth and universe that we inhabit today as life inside a snow globe. You've seen something like this before. Encased inside this glass is a scene, in this case, of New York City. There is the great world outside of the globe then there is this little scene inside the snow globe. You see, human history is lived out in something like this little snow globe of time and space. And many people think that is all there is. But the Bible tells us that there is a very real place called heaven that exists outside this universe. It is the dwelling place of God, of the angels and the believers who have died down through the ages. So there is this separation between life inside the snow globe of the present earth and universe, and life outside that in God's heaven. But the Bible tells us that there will be a day when God will completely remake the present heavens and earth. Why? Because it has been corrupted by sin. And the snow globe of this present heaven and earth will be completely swallowed up by the new heaven and the new earth.

So the first thing I want you to see is...

1. THE NEWNESS OF OUR FOREVER HOME

Revelation 21:1 (NIV) - 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.

Everything about it is new. The word “new” means not just new in time, but new in kind. There's never been anything like it before. Just like there had never been a resurrection body like the one Jesus had after His resurrection. The present heaven is great. If you or I die before God brings in the new heaven and the new earth it will be absolutely glorious to be in the presence of God in a beautiful, joyous, peaceful place called heaven. But the new heaven and the new earth that God will bring is beyond imagination. The unstoppable purpose of God for creation and for His people will not be finished until all things are made new.

2 Peter 3:13 (NIV) - But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

And this will all happen after the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 21:5a - He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

ILLUSTRATION - One of the silliest questions anyone could ask in heaven is “What’s new?” Uh ... everything! And it will be forever new.

So our forever home is totally new. There there’s...

2. THE HOLINESS OF OUR FOREVER HOME

Revelation 21:2 (NIV) - I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

So there’s the new heaven and the new earth, and coming down out of heaven is a new city ... the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem was God’s city in the OT and in will figure prominently in the eternal reign of God in the new heaven and the new earth. And it is this city that is to be our eternal home ... not a cloud somewhere over the rainbow ... a city.

And it is a *holy* city. When we think of cities today we don’t think of that, do we? Cities are places where there are crowds and congestion and corruption and crime. But this is a holy city.

When the Bible talks about something that is “holy” it means that it is set apart for a holy God and His holy purposes. Right now the universe, and the earth and forces of nature seem to fight against the purposes of God. Can you imagine a city where the purposes of God and the will of God are done completely?

This heavenly city is like “a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

ILLUSTRATION – Now most all of us have been to weddings. And it is one of the most glorious moments in the wedding, particularly here in our church, when those double doors open and there appears a beautifully dressed bride for her husband. And the groom hasn’t ever seen his bride like this before. And the closer she gets the bigger his eyes get. She’s gorgeous. And this new city will make the same kind of entrance on the eternal stage.

Most importantly, however, heaven is holy because God is there.

Revelation 21:3 - 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.

And next week we'll conclude this series on heaven talking about what it will be like to have this intimate relationship with God in heaven. Don't miss it. So there's the newness of our forever home and the holiness of our forever home. Also...

3. **BRIGHTNESS OF OUR FOREVER HOME**

Revelation 21:11 (NIV) - It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Heaven is bright with the glory of God. God's glory is the outshining of all His wonderful attributes. And it is the most striking feature of the heavenly city.

And that's what most of the modern books and movies miss about heaven. Heaven is depicted in such a way that God and his glory are really not the center of attention. It's all about us. I tell you, the most striking thing about heaven is not your mansion, or a conversation that you want to have with this person or that person. The main thing is not getting our tears wiped away, though that is very real. The amazing thing about heaven is God is there in all of His glory ... like we've never seen it before!

In heaven we don't just get glimpses or peeks at the glory of God. The glory of God is totally unfiltered. It is 100% unscreened, full on, unedited, awe-inspiring, breathtaking ... God! And that's the big deal about heaven.

The Holy City is ablaze with the glory of God.

Revelation 21:23 - 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.

So there's the brightness of our eternal home. Next ...

4. **VASTNESS OF OUR FOREVER HOME**

Heaven is huge! John sees ...

Revelation 21:12 (NIV) - 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.

Now heaven has very real features, but each of those features reveals or symbolizes something about the nature of God and the nature of our redemption. The number twelve is featured here. The twelve gates of the city are each named for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Revelation 21:13 (NIV) - There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.

Revelation 21:14 (NIV) - The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The city actually has twelve foundations, not just one. And these foundations are not buried in the ground ... they are visible. And the foundations are each named for one of the twelve apostles, representing the church. The apostles were the first believers in Christ and their teachings are the foundation of our faith.

So you see here that the city is not only God's dwelling, but also the dwelling of the people of God ... OT and NT saints of all the ages are there in heaven.

Note: And I will add that babies and children who have died before they realized their need for Christ to save them are there in heaven. If you've lost a baby in a miscarriage or a premature death or in a tragic accident, you can look forward to seeing them in heaven. While they were never *saved* because they were too young, they are *safe* in the arms of Jesus.

Now we see more of the dimensions in...

Revelation 21:15 - The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

Revelation 21:16 - 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.

12,000 stadia would be roughly the equivalent to 1500 miles. So the city is about 1500 miles wide and long and high. We're talking here about a city with a footprint roughly the size of the US and spanning into the heavens 1500 miles.

Some say the city is shaped in a perfect cube. It is as high as it is deep as it is long. Others say that it would be in the shape of a pyramid. But whatever its shape, it is "ginormous"! And there is room enough for all the saints of all the ages ... hundreds of millions or perhaps billions of us.

So the city is big, and it's also beautiful. And that's the next feature we'll see.

5. THE LOVELINESS OF OUR FOREVER HOME

HEAVEN IS EXQUISITE!

Revelation 21:18 (NIV) - The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

Now John is using his own earthly frame of reference to describe what he saw. Apparently both the jasper and the gold are different from these metals we know today. Back in v.11 the jasper is transparent, and here in v.18 the gold is clear like glass.

And the decorations of the foundations (with the apostles' names inscribed on them), according to vv.19-20, include 12 stones of different colors. There's a rich mixture of blues and greens and reds

and whites and gold and yellow and violet and purple. The stones blend together to provide a radiant array of beautiful colors.

Revelation 21:21 - The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

Some of you ladies have pearls. You know how beautiful a single pearl is. Can you imagine one of those pearls being hundreds of feet high? Imagine that! Some of you ladies are saying, “Yes, I am.”

Notice in v.21 that there is a “great street.” The word literally means “a wide place.” A city the size of the Holy City would have millions of miles of streets ... all paved with gold ... gold so pure that it is transparent?

Amazing beauty! Our God is a God of beauty. He created beauty. And He will lavish His beauty on His Holy City and on His Holy people. So the next time you see a spectacular sunset, or a vast mountain range, or a beautiful garden ... when you see something like that it is a little peek at heaven’s beauty. And it’s God whispering, “Heaven ... Heaven is coming.”

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – Last Monday I got to do something I have long dreamed of doing ... running the Boston Marathon. Because the race was on the day after Easter we flew out last Sunday afternoon, arrived late Sunday night and Monday morning was race day. I was told there would be a bus waiting in Boston Common to take runners to the starting line 26 miles outside of Boston. *It was there just as they said to would be.* I was told there would be an Athlete’s Village where runners waited for their group to start ... plenty of pre-race food and drink. *It was just as they said it would be.* I was told that the first part of the race was downhill, and that I should be careful not to go out too quickly. *It was just as they said it would be.* I was told that there might be a million spectators along the course cheering us on. *It was just as they said it would be.* I was told that two-thirds of the way into the race there was something called Heartbreak Hill, which is actually a series of four tough hills in a row. I was told that you should go out slower than you think in the first part of the race in order to save your energy for that hard part of the race. I foolishly ignored that advice ... didn’t think I needed to do that ... and *it was just as they said it would be.* I hit the wall at that point and struggled from there to the end of the race ... it was bad, *just like they said it would be.* They said that the last half-mile of the race was inspiring as you turn right on to Hereford Street and left onto Boylston Street where for the first time you catch a glimpse of the famous finish line. They said that this year it would be particularly emotional because of the bombings that took place at the finish line last year, and the crowds would be huge and noisy. *It was just as they said it would be.* It was so emotionally overwhelming that I forgot my mistakes, my pain, my weakness and my frustrations. *The joy of that moment was just as they said it would be.* I was told that when you cross the finish line that there would be a line of volunteers waiting to greet you, congratulate you, and place around your neck the Boston Marathon Finishers Medal ... the same medal whether you finished in two hours and twenty minutes or four hours and twenty minutes or longer. And, yes, *it was just as they said it would be.*

Loved ones, I’m here to tell you that the Bible says that...

2 Peter 3:13 (NIV) - In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

There are lot of things in life that disappoint us. The Bible says that those who hope in the Lord will not be disappointed. Our forever home will be just as they said it would be.