

Text: Revelation 21:3-4; 22:1-5

Title: “Face to Face with God”

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our new format. Our purpose in all of this is to give God greater glory.

ILLUSTRATION – That song reminds of the old Fanny Crosby hymn we sang last week, “My Savior First of All.”

When my life work is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see,
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

Thru the gates of the city in a robe of spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears will ever fall;
In the glad song of ages I shall mingle with delight
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the print of the nails in His hand.

Some of you may know that this great hymn-writer Fanny Crosby was actually blind. Yet she knew the first person she would ever see would be Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – The popular song by Mercy Me says:

“Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still?
Will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine.”

We’ve been talking about heaven. And right now about all we can do is imagine. The Bible tells us so much about heaven, but it’s hard to conceive what it will be like because we just don’t have the capacity in our present bodies to understand fully.

Let me ask you this question: What is the goal of our salvation? What’s the point? What is eternal life for us as believers? Is it having our sins forgiven? Yes. Is it knowing that we will go to heaven when we die? Yes. Is it having peace and satisfaction in this life of trouble? Yes. But do you know how Jesus would answer that question? Praying to the Father Jesus said...

John 17:3 - Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

So eternal life is about an intimate relationship with the only true God and His Son Jesus Christ. And to some degree we get that. When we talk about getting saved we talk about when we “came to know Christ.” The Holy Spirit comes to live in us and He makes it possible for us to talk to God and listen to Him. He makes Christ real to us. There are worship times when it feels like God is right here ... quiet times in the Word of God when it seems He’s right here ... times of prayer when we feel like we are really talking to God and He is listening. And there are even times when we are in trouble, but we feel He’s right there by our side.

And then there are times when it doesn’t feel that way ... like I’m just mouthing words in my worship and I’m not really getting through to God ... when I’m praying and it feels like I’m just talking to myself ... when I read the Word and I really don’t experience God ... times when God seems so far away. There are times when I cry out to God in my trouble but it doesn’t feel like He’s there. I know in my head He is, but I don’t feel it always. Let’s be honest. We all battle this. So what do we do?

I want to assure you that when Jesus said, “This is eternal life: that they may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ,” that is the truth. You can know God now, and you will know Him for eternity. It may not always be this overwhelming feeling, but we have a relationship with God. But for the times that it is hard and sometimes illusive for us to feel close to God, you need to know that there will be a day when we will be so completely and eternally cured of our sin disease that we will no longer have any trouble knowing God. In fact, the way we experience and enjoy in God now is nothing compared to what it will be like.

And this is what we will experience in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Today as I conclude this series on heaven I want to talk about what it will be like to one day be face to face with God. Let’s open our Bibles again to Revelation 21 where we read of the vision that God gave to John about what this New Heaven and New Earth will be like. Read Revelation 21:3-4.

Today I want to talk to you about what makes heaven heaven. When it comes right down to it, this is what eternal life means ... life in the presence of God forever. We know that now, but our fallen bodies and our fallen world keep us from fully experiencing that. I want to show you three ways we will know God then. We will experience...

1. THE UNLIMITED PRESENCE OF GOD

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.

Now God dwelling with His people is a theme that runs right through the Bible. Remember when the Israelites came out of Egypt God gave them a tabernacle, a portable worship tent where He dwelled among them as they travelled through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. When they got to the Promised Land God gave them a temple in Jerusalem where He dwelled among

them. But generally speaking, the presence of God was limited to those structures. Fast forward to when Jesus was born. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So for the first time people saw God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. But the presence of God was limited by the physical body of Jesus. After Jesus died, rose again and ascended back to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of believers. And the Bible says that we are the temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God. But that is limited to us as believers. Sure we know that God is everywhere, but He is not experienced everywhere because we are sinful and our world is sinful.

But there is a day coming when God Himself will come to dwell on this earth and He is going to bring the full expression of His Kingdom with Him. And every square inch of the earth and the heavens will pulsate in a visible way with the presence of God.

Look at it again:

Revelation 21:3 - “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.

So with all of our senses we will have full access to the presence of God! Now we get a taste of this in the present.

Psalms 16:11 - You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

And we have a little taste of that joy in His presence and eternal pleasures at His right hand, but nowhere like we will experience in that day when God moves in on us. Right now we sin and the presence of God doesn't feel like it is real. But what an amazing thing it will be when we are so cured of our sin disease that we will experience the unlimited presence of God every second of our existence and in every place we go.

But there's something else we experience in this regard:

2. THE UNCONDITIONAL CARE OF GOD

Revelation 21:4a - He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Literally, God will wipe away every *single* tear. It's that personal for Him. God knows when His children cry, and He knows why we cry.

ILLUSTRATION – I'm amazed at a mother's ability to know the cries of their child. There's the mad cry ... there's the pain cry ... there's the hungry cry. And a mom knows how to deal with each of those cries and tears. And how much more does God.

And most of the time we have to wipe away our own tears. But it's a tender thing when someone else wipes away your tears.

Now I don't know how God will manage to do this. With millions and millions of believers in heaven, how will God deal this tenderly and personally with each one of us? I don't know. I simply know this ... it isn't false advertising. Somehow you and I as believers will experience the personal, unconditional care of God as He tenderly wipes away our tears from the years of heartaches in this life. Living the Christian life is hard, and in some way we all will limp across the finish line. That's why the Bible calls us to perseverance ... because the race is hard.

We may step into heaven with tears on our cheeks, but they'll be the last tears we shed. Why? Because it says...

Revelation 21:4b - There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Sin is at the root of all these things ... death, mourning, crying and pain. But sin and death has been defeated by Christ in His resurrection. And in that day we, and the universe we inhabit, will be completely cured of our sin disease.

And John says more about this in Revelation 22. He unveils more of this vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth, and what it means for our relationship with God. Read Revelation 22:3-4.

Revelation 22:3a - No longer will there be any curse.

What is the curse? It is the effects of sin on us and on the universe we inhabit. That's why God's redemptive activity isn't complete until we receive new bodies with which we will inhabit the New Heaven and the New Earth. No more curse of sin, so that we will experience God like never before. Notice...

Revelation 22:4 - They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

But here's what I want you to see. In that day we will experience the unlimited presence of God, the unconditional care of God ... but most sublimely we will experience...

3. THE UNOBSTRUCTED VISION OF GOD

Revelation 22:4 - They will see his face...

Now in the OT the general rule was if you saw God you died. Even when the great Moses asked to see the face of God, God replied...

Exodus 33:20 (NIV) – “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

And that's pretty much the way it was all the way through the OT. Then we come to the NT and things begin to change. Remember that when Christ came we saw the glory of the One and Only Son of the Father full of grace and truth. So in the Word and by the Holy Spirit we “see” God in Christ, but only by faith.

1 Peter 1:8 - Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

But it's just a taste of the joy we will experience when we see Him face to face.

And again, that's part of our dilemma today. Deep inside we feel like David who prayed...

Psalm 42:1 - As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

Psalm 42:2 - My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Listen, that is a very accurate diagnosis of your situation ... your soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Deep down in your soul you long to go and meet with God because He created you for a relationship with Himself. And it's like we feel homesick for God and we're asking, like David, "When can I go and meet with God?"

Don't get me wrong. When we put our faith in Jesus we *do* get to know God and His Son Christ. We *do* have a relationship with Him where we can walk with Him and talk with Him. And His presence is so available and so real to us now that He can fully satisfy our souls ... as much as we can take in these perishable bodies where we still feel the downward drag of sin.

But can you imagine what it will be like when our bodies are raised and changed, to where our vision of God is not clouded by our selfishness and sinfulness ... and for the first time we actually see God face to face.

ILLUSTRATION – In his book on heaven Randy Alcorn tells the old parable of a kindhearted king was out on a hunt in the forest when he found a blind, destitute orphan boy. The king takes the boy to his palace, adopts him as his son, and provides completely for his care. He sees that the boy receives the finest education. The boy is extremely grateful, and he loves the king, his new father, with all his heart. Then the boy became a man and surgeon performed an operation on the boy's eyes, and for the first time in his life he was able to see. This boy, who was once a starving orphan, has now been for years a royal prince at home in the king's palace. But to that point he had never seen the face of his father. Now he could see the magnificent food on the king's table, the beauty of the king's gardens and the wonders of his palace. But the most important thing was that now he was finally able to see the face of the father that he loved, and who had shown him such favor and love. What an amazing vision ... not in his imagination, but with his own two eyes.

And it will be like that for us in heaven.

Revelation 22:4b - And his name will be on their foreheads.

To have His name written on our foreheads is a seal of ownership. We will know Him ... and He will know us. That's what the Apostle Paul was talking about in I Corinthians 13 when he said...

1 Corinthians 13:12 - Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

ILLUSTRATION – This evening our children’s choirs will give their Spring Concert. It’s always great. Parents who normally sit at the back of the room get here early for the front seats. Grandparents who normally don’t want people sitting too close to them pack in a pew like sardines. Why? They want to be up close to see their kids or grandkids. And we scan the choir of little angels up on the stage, and they’re all so cute ... even the little boy that’s picking his nose, or the little girl that sings louder than the rest. Then our eyes rest on our little one ... our child or grandchild. And delight fills our heart over the sight of that little face. Oh the others are cute, but this one’s ours.

You may feel that there are people that are closer to God than you are ... that they have a better connection with God than you have. In that day, you will know Him, and He will know you. His name will be on your forehead ... “That one’s mine.”

Listen, God will be no more glorious than He is now. His love for you will be no greater than it is now. He knows you now, and loves you now. The difference is that now we have trouble knowing and believing that. Then there will be no doubt about it. This is what we sing about in this song “You Hold Me Now.”