

"Heaven"

Revelation 21:1-22:5

Baxter Exum (#965)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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Introduction:

This morning I think that most of us might admit that it is very easy to get caught up in activity to the point where we actually forget some of those things that are truly important. Many years ago, someone wrote a book entitled, ***The Tyranny of the Urgent***, and in that book the author pointed out that many times our lives are controlled not by what is truly important, but by what appears to be urgent at the time.

And so we get caught up in our schoolwork. We might focus on the next exam, on the next assignment, or the next term paper, and we get so focused that we tend to forget the other things that are going on around us. We get caught up in our finances. We get focused on planning for retirement. We get focused on saving up for a big purchase. We get focused on our debt. And sometimes we forget the other things in life that are truly important. We may even get caught up in various relationships. We get bogged down with certain health conditions. We are certainly tempted to get busy with work, or with family, or with any other hobby or activity to the point where we may even forget the goal that we have when this life is over.

And so this morning I would like for us to slow down for a few minutes and think about the fact that we are going to heaven! We need to take a deep breath, we need to put aside all of the cares of this world, and we need to remind ourselves that we are going to heaven! We need to dream about what that is going to be like. We need to think about it. We need to focus on it. We need to meditate on it. We need to lose ourselves in the promise of God that we are going to heaven!

This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to the last two chapters of the entire Bible—it should be very easy to find, just go to the back and turn back a few pages—because this morning I would like for us to dream about heaven by looking together at **Revelation 21-22**. **»PPT»**

You know, it is interesting that the Bible does not really spend a lot of time describing heaven. In fact, we actually know a lot more about hell than we do about heaven! Perhaps part of the problem in describing heaven comes in trying to use human language to describe something that no human has ever seen.

This morning, then, we will not get bogged down in the details, but I would like for us to look at the most comprehensive description of heaven ever found in the Bible, and then I would like for us to close with a rather brief summary of some of the major

concepts. If you will, please look with me at **Revelation 21:1**, and we will look together through **Revelation 22:5**...

Revelation 21:1-22:5...

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them , ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said , "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. ⁸ "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone , which is the second death."

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. ¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

¹³ There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.

¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ And he measured its wall,

seventy -two yards, according to human measurements , which are also angelic measurements. ¹⁸ The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; ²⁰ the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

²² I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple . ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; ²⁶ and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

¹ Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

As we look back over what we have just read, I would like for us to consider some of the very basic reasons why all of us should look forward to going to heaven...

I. One of the first things we realize as we look back over what we have just read is that HEAVEN IS PICTURED AS A BIG AND BEAUTIFUL CITY.

»PPT»

And again, as we start with the physical description, we start to realize that the apostle John was doing the best he could do through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but he was obviously struggling to describe heaven in terms that all of us can understand.

Nevertheless, heaven is described as a city. In **Revelation 21:2** (and in **verse 10**), he refers to the, **"...holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."** The idea of God's people looking forward to a city goes back hundreds of years. We remember that Abraham was living in the great city of Ur of the Chaldees. That city had a population of around a quarter of a million people, and so it was a city larger than the city of Madison. In fact, the city of Ur was a center of education. It was a center for commerce. Its craftsmen were respected around the world—Abraham was living there—he was comfortable, he was wealthy, he probably had a large house, and yet we find in **Hebrews 11:8-10** that Abraham was looking for a city even better than the one he left. The Bible says that, **"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."** Abraham, therefore, was looking for the city of God.

He did not find it in this life. In fact, the Bible tells us that Abraham spent the rest of his life living in tents—a powerful reminder from God that this world was not their final home. They were looking for the eternal city of heaven. And because of their great faith, the writer of Hebrews goes on to say in **Hebrews 11:16**, **"But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."**

It is interesting to me that heaven is not described as a garden. We think back to the Garden of Eden—it was a beautiful place. But what is the difference between a city and a garden? I would suggest that the main difference is people. A city is a city only because it is filled with people. Heaven will be a place of relationships. In heaven, we will meet people who lived a thousand years ago. We will meet the great heroes of the faith from the Old Testament. We will meet the apostles. We will meet the great heroes that we named our children after. We will meet Noah, and Elijah, and Joshua, and Jacob, and Silas, and Tabitha, and yes, we will even meet Gabriel! According to **Revelation 5:9**, we will meet people from, **"...every tribe and tongue and people and nation."** We will meet God's children from all around the world.

We will meet our loved ones who have gone on before us. Brother G.C. Brewer put it this way,

When I was a boy I used to think of heaven as a glorious city, with jeweled walls, and gates of pearl, with nobody in it, but the angels, and they were all strangers to me. But after a while my little brother died, then I thought of heaven as that great city, full of angels, with just one little fellow in it that I was acquainted with. He was the only one I knew there, at that time. Then another brother died, and there were two in heaven that I knew. Then my acquaintances began to die, and the number of my friends in heaven grew larger all the time. But, it was not 'till one of my own little ones was taken that I began to

feel that I had a personal interest in heaven. Now other friends and loved ones have gone there, and it seems as if I know more in heaven than I know on earth. And now, when my thoughts turn to heaven, it is not the gold and the jewels and the pearls that I think of—but the loved ones there. It is not the place so much as the company that makes heaven seem beautiful.

What a beautiful homecoming that will be! We believe the words of the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 2:9**, **"...but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.'"** We are looking forward to that day!

II. Not only is heaven described as a city, but we also find that HEAVEN IS A PLACE WHERE WE WILL BE WITH GOD. »PPT»

In fact, in **Revelation 22:4**, we find that we will see God face-to-face. Perhaps you can remember from the Old Testament that Moses wanted to see God's face, but in **Exodus 33:20**, God said, **"You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"** It is almost as if Moses could not have handled full exposure to the face of God. It is almost as if seeing God's face would have caused Moses' brain to blow a circuit—it would have caused a mental breakdown. But when we get to heaven, we will be able to look at God face-to-face!

Today we know how important it is to be able to see a friend face-to-face. We can look to the popularity of online societies like MySpace and Facebook. E-mail doesn't quite do it these days, and so people have devised new ways of connecting. But even with all of the different ways we communicate on-line, the time comes when we need to meet someone face-to-face. The Bible says that our very first face-to-face meeting with God will take place as we enter the gates of heaven.

If there was ever someone who wanted to see the face of God, it would have been a man by the name of Job. Job suffered in ways that we could never imagine, and yet he never cursed God. Instead, he opened his mouth, and he said, **"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!"** (**Job 19:25-27**). More than anything, Job wanted to see God.

One of the highlights of meeting God is found in **Revelation 21:4**, where we find that God, **"...will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** As I understand it, we may be crying as we enter heaven for the very first time. Perhaps we will be crying tears of joy, and then again we may be crying tears of great sadness. At the Judgment Day, there will be many husbands and wives who will be separated—never to see one another again. There will be many parents and children who will be separated—some will be saved and some will be lost. Life-long friends will go their

separate ways. Tears will be shed, but the Bible tells us that God will wipe every single tear from our eyes. And so we find that heaven is a place where we will go to be with God.

III. As we continue looking back at the book of Revelation, we also find that HEAVEN WILL BE A PLACE OF ETERNAL LIFE. »PPT»

In the opening verses of **Revelation 22**, we read about the river of the water of life as well as the tree of life. Both of these take us back to the Garden of Eden. We remember that not only did the garden have a river flowing through it, but we also remember that the garden contained the tree of life. After Adam sinned, of course, God took away access to the tree of life, so that Adam would not live forever in a world that had been damaged by sin, and so the Bible says that God stationed an angel outside of the garden—an angel who was armed with a flaming sword, so access to the tree of life would be cut off from the human race.

But here we are in heaven, and we find that access to the tree of life has been restored. The broken relationship has been completely re-established, and we will live in heaven for eternity.

At this point, of course, some people will object. The science fiction writer Isaac Asimov once wrote, **"I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse."** For some reason, people have the idea that heaven will involve sitting on a cloud playing a harp, and yet I do not find that picture anywhere in the Bible. I have read the Bible from cover to cover, and it is not there. I have seen it in the comics in the Sunday paper, but I have never found it in the Bible. If you have, please let me know, because it does not sound very pleasant to me, either.

In fact, one of my dreams about heaven as a little kid was that we would get dressed up in a polyester suit that scratched my neck and sing for hours and hours, then we would go in a little changing booth and change again, and then go back out and sing for hours and hours, and over and over. It was not a very pleasant view of heaven! In fact, it was actually more of a nightmare. This dream probably started shortly after my mom had to drag me out of church by the ear down in Freeport, Illinois. I do not remember exactly what I did, but I must not have enjoyed the singing.

So what does the Bible actually say that we will really be doing in heaven? Worshiping God will be part of it; however, it goes much deeper than that. **Revelation 22:3** is very interesting. The Bible says, **"There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him."** And so the Bible tells us that we will serve God in heaven. What kind of service will it be? I do not know, but I do know that there will no longer be any curse. Do you remember the curse?

Way back in the Garden of Eden, God cursed the man by making his work difficult. In **Genesis 3:17-19**, God said, ***"Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*** Even today, work is not easy. We get tired, we face frustrations, it is difficult. But in heaven, the curse has been lifted. And so we will serve God forever, we will have meaningful work to do, our bodies will never get tired, and our service to God will be a joy—for eternity!

IV. As we close our thoughts on heaven, I also need to point out one more reason for going there, and that is, IN HEAVEN THERE WILL BE NO SIN.

»PPT»

In fact, we find that heaven will be quite restricted, because in **Revelation 21:8**, we have a list of those who will not be allowed in heaven. Right in the middle of this beautiful description, God tells us exactly who will not be there. It's almost as if God is giving us comfort—He's telling us that those who messed up this world will not be allowed in the next.

Yesterday I had the privilege of being trained in the skill of belaying. The training took place over at Kennedy Elementary School and then in the field house at Lafollette High School. Belaying is basically holding the rope for others who are climbing on a high ropes course. So yesterday I had the privilege of making it all the way to the ceiling of the gym at Lafollette. But while I was there I got to know some teachers, and I heard some of them discussing the guidelines for who gets to participate in the overnight trip to the school forest. Several were very strict, and they explained why. They said that if a child could not behave in the classroom (a structured environment with the principal right down the hall), then there is no way that they should be allowed to go spend the night in the woods—otherwise, they will make life miserable for the rest of the class. There is a lot of wisdom in that line of reasoning. And it seems to be at least part of the picture in **verse 8**. Those who cannot behave on earth have no right to go to heaven and ruin it for the rest of us.

Heaven will be a place where sinful people are not allowed. As John says, ***"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."***

In our society, some of those sins are worse than others. But any one of those things can keep us out of heaven. The cowardly will not be there. Those who do not believe will not be there. Those who commit abominations will not be there. Those who commit murder will not be there—even if it is the murder of an unborn child. The only Supreme Court that really matters has already made a ruling on this issue—right here in **verse 8**. Those who commit sins of sexual immorality will not be there. Those who practice sorcery will not be there. The reference to sorcerers goes back to the Greek word PHARMAKIEA. This is where we get the word "pharmacy," and it

refers to the use of mind-altering drugs that were used in the ancient practice of witchcraft. Those who worship idols will not be there.

And yet as we look at this list, we realize that each of these sins can be forgiven. **Verse 8**, therefore, is not only a warning, but it is also an encouragement. All of us would be headed for that place if it were not for the amazing grace of God. And so we are reminded this morning that heaven is a place where sin is not allowed.

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning we have only given a brief overview of heaven. It is so easy to get overwhelmed with how quickly life is passing us by, it is so easy to get overwhelmed with the “tyranny of the urgent,” but I certainly hope and pray that we have been able to slow down a little this morning—at least enough to realize that we are going to heaven!

The Bible tells us that we can join God in heaven for eternity if we react to His free offer of salvation by obeying the gospel. The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We obey the gospel by turning away from sin, by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water, and by being lifted up out of the water to start living the Christian life. If you have any questions, we hope you will talk to one of us. But if you are ready to be immersed in water right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org