

WE BELIEVE IN HEAVEN

Revelation 21 – 22:5

When you get right down to it, when you cut right to the chase, the message of the Bible is amazingly simple. And the message is, “God created you and placed you on this earth. This life is a mere preparation for the next life, which lasts forever. Make sure you are ready when eternity’s marshal comes for you.” Now, the fact is that most people, including Christians, don’t think too much about the next life. Or sometimes when we do think about it and talk about it we can become just a little unbiblical in order to bring comfort to troubled minds. I heard recently about a conversation that Janet Burroughs had with one of her grandsons about Heaven in which this was the case. Janet and Joe’s old dog had died, and her grandson, who was 4 or 5 at the time, was concerned. So he asked Janet, “What happens to dogs when they die?” And Janet, wanting to be as comforting as possible, said, “I think they go to dog heaven.” And then her grandson said, “What would Jesus want with an old, worn out dog like that?”

So beloved, we have to be careful what we say when we speak of Heaven. But if you are saved then you should be thinking a whole lot about Heaven. Many of you remember Ruth Owuor, who gave her testimony in our church not long ago. Ruth is a precious, 50-something Kenyan Christian who has been in America for about 20 years. She left fleeing from an abusive husband. But just about all she thinks about these days is Kenya. For you see, Ruth has founded an orphanage for Kenyan children while she’s been here and has supported it with her novelty shop business ever since. And Ruth’s husband has gotten right with God and is now serving Jesus with all of his heart, and she is no longer afraid of him. And Ruth has three children whom she missed see growing up and grandchildren she has never seen. And Ruth is longing to go home. Her target date is April 1. I talked to my sister yesterday and she told me that Ruth’s body is here but her heart and soul are in Kenya.

Oh, beloved, that’s the way it should be with you and me in our attitude toward Heaven!! For the Bible says that our citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20), where one day soon we will see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ face to face and live with Him forever and ever. And for this reason Jesus says to us, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust decoys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

Where are you laying up your treasures day by day? If it is Heaven, then Jesus says your heart is there – you are longing to go there. That’s the way it was with Paul. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I desire to depart and be with Christ...” (Phil. 1:23). Can you honestly say that? Well, this morning we are going to look at just

what Heaven is going to be like for those who go there. And I pray that when we leave this service today, every one of us can truthfully say, “I know I’m going to that wonderful place called Heaven, and praise be to God if He calls me today!”

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Revelation 21:1-11a, 22 – 22: 5. In our text this morning we have the most thorough description of Heaven in the entire Bible. And though Paul tells us that eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, neither has entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those that love Him, we are going to attempt to **understand four precious truths** about Heaven that will cause our hearts to rejoice. And the first thing that I want us to see about Heaven is that it is a place of **unhindered intimacy**. And I’m talking about intimacy with God.

Look at v. 3 again. John heard a loud voice from Heaven saying, “Behold!” Or, “Look! God is about to come down and dwell with men”. But it is as if the angel who was speaking thought that this truth was so marvelous it would be hard for John to believe. And so he repeats himself with emphasis, saying, “God Himself will be with them and be their God”. Beloved, in eternity God will not remain aloof in the far reaches of the universe and send an angelic representative to live with us, a heavenly ambassador to report back to Him every week with what’s going on with us, our needs, and our desires. He Himself will descend and live right here with us! And that will be the greatest thing about Heaven.

Think about something for a moment. When are you the most peaceful, whatever is going on around you? I’ll tell you. It is when you sense the awesome presence of God! When you feel His Spirit so strong in your heart that you just know that however your situation comes down, you are going to be alright. And you want to go nowhere else and do nothing else. You just want to stay right where you are with God, just as Peter wanted to stay with Jesus on the Mountain of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1f). Because there is nothing as precious to your soul as being in the presence of God! The Bible says that in God’s presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

But even though we have the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts moment by moment, sadly we do not live moment by moment with this fullness of joy and pleasure, do we? Because we live in a corrupt, sinful world, and just like John writes in v. 4, life is full of death, sorrow, crying, and pain. Some of you live in physical pain every day; you can’t remember the last time you had a pain free day. Some of you live with other types of grievous wounds every day. Not physical wounds, but emotional wounds. Hurtful words, hurtful actions. You’ve tried to forgive and maybe you have forgiven, but you can’t forget and the wounds are still deep and they still hurt you, years later. Some of you live daily with disappointments, disappointments in your children or your parents or your spouse or Christians who you thought you knew and could trust. Some of you live day by day with regret. We all have regrets, but your regrets torment you. Regrets for things you have done and

regrets for things you haven't done. And Satan is ever near in these times of trouble to cause us to fear and doubt. This is why Jesus says so many times to His disciples, "Fear not!"

But when we cry out to Jesus in our fears and He comes to us when the storm is raging and the rocks and the rain is threatening, He gives us joy and peace and comfort and strength that is not comprehensible by those who've never known it. And it is not necessarily because He immediately calms the storm, because often He doesn't. But it is because He is with us! And His real, sweet presence is **precious**, more precious to us than anything else in the world!

But then what often happens? After we've passed through these difficult times Satan will return and attack us again, dragging back up the same doubts, fears, and heartaches. But praise God, in Heaven you and I will no longer vacillate back and forth from gladness to sadness, from the glory of Heaven in our souls to the gloom of Hell. For we will have unhindered intimacy with God forevermore! And John writes that when God comes to dwell with us He will wipe away every tear from our eye from all that has grieved us and He will make all things new (v. 4-5). He will give us new bodies that will never feel pain again. He will give us new minds that will never be touched by hurt, disappointment, and regret again. He will give us new hearts to praise Him forever and ever. Beloved, Heaven will be glorious for many reasons, but being in God's continual presence tops them all!

But there is another truth about Heaven that I want us to see. Not only is Heaven a place of **unhindered intimacy**, it is a place of **unrestrained glory**. Look again at v. 10-11a. What do you think that John meant when He said that the New Jerusalem had the glory of God? Well, the first thing that he means is the physical properties of the city itself. And he begins to describe those properties in v. 11. We do not have time to read them all, but let me just mention a few.

Beloved, Heaven will be a big place! John says in v. 16 that the New Jerusalem, which is the capital city of Heaven, will be a colossal cube 12,000 furlongs in length, width, and height, which is about 1,350 miles in each direction. That would make the New Jerusalem extend from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and from Colorado to the Atlantic Ocean. One scholar has estimated that if 20 billion people make it to Heaven, then each one of our mansions will sit on a 75 acre parcel of ground that will extend 1/3 of a mile high. Why, that's enough room for every man to have his own fishing lake and nine-hole golf course, and every woman to have her own Walmart and Target. But Heaven will be bigger than the New Jerusalem. For John writes that the gates will always be open and that the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. That means that that people will be entering in and leaving the New Jerusalem. We do not know how much territory takes up the rest of Heaven. But if the capital city is as big as it is, only Heaven knows!

Let me tell you just a few other facts about the New Jerusalem. Its walls are made of jasper, and they are 216' feet high (v. 17). That's a total of 5400 miles of jasper walls 216' high! And the gates of the New Jerusalem are made of pearl, and its streets are made of pure gold. You've perhaps heard the old joke about the carnal Christian who tried to sneak into heaven with a few gold coins in his pocket. But just as he was about to leave the induction center St. Peter said to him, "Son, what are you doing with that pavement in your pocket?" But beloved, it's not just the streets that are made with pure gold in the New Jerusalem, it's every building in the whole city. Look again at v. 18b. Yes, sir, the glory of God is manifested in the properties of the New Jerusalem.

But beloved, we need to know that the walls of jasper, gates of pearl, and buildings and streets of gold are like a match to the noonday sun when compared with Heaven's greatest glory. What do you suppose is the greatest glory of Heaven? Look down at v. 23. The Lamb is God's glory that illuminates Heaven. Friends, from eternity past, when God wanted to manifest His glory in the greatest way He always did it in one way, and that way was through His only begotten Son, Jesus. In John 17:5 Jesus speaks of the glory that He shared with His Father in Heaven before He came to the earth. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem the angelic chorus announced His birth by saying, "Glory to God in the highest..." Hebrews 1 tells us that God has spoken to us in these last days through His Son, Who is the brightness of His glory. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4:6 that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". And in Heaven God manifests His glory to the highest degree by the perpetual radiance of His Son, Whose glory is Heaven's light every moment, non-stop throughout all eternity.

So just exactly how much of God's glory does Jesus radiate? Before you answer, think about this. Twice in Isaiah God said, "I will not give My glory to another" (42:8; 48:11). God will not give one smidgen of His glory to another, for He alone in all the universe is worthy of glory and praise. So how can Jesus receive any of God's glory? Because, my friends, Jesus is God! Heb. 1:8, speaking of Jesus – "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever". And therefore back in v. 6 of Heb. 1 God says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him". So how much of God's glory is revealed in Jesus? All of it!!

I tell you, beloved, one of the greatest reasons that I am excited about going to Heaven is that I will see my Lord Jesus Christ receive the glory that is due unto His holy name once and for all. We live in a world where the name of our Lord Jesus is maligned on every hand. Comedians poke fun at the name of Jesus. Politicians squelch the name of Jesus. Infidels curse the name of Jesus. And there are theologians who actually deny the name of Jesus.

OH, but that's not the case in Heaven! In Heaven the name of Jesus is written on the forehead of every saint (Rev. 3:12). In Heaven Jesus' name is glorified

because as God the Son He willingly stepped off His throne, laid His royal robe aside and exchanged it for swaddling clothes, strips of cloth, as He was made flesh and laid in a manger. And 33 years later as the sinless God-Man Jesus bore the sins of the whole world on an old rugged cross. My sins and your sins. And because of this God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him a name above every name. And in Heaven all other kings will bow down to King Jesus. All other presidents, monarchs, and dictators. And you will bow down, whether you accept Him as your Lord and Savior or not. And every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Brothers and sisters, what a day, glorious day that will be, when you and I see the **unrestrained glory of God** in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen that Heaven is a place of **unhindered intimacy** and **unrestrained glory**. But our text also tells us that Heaven is a place of **unmixed purity**. Look back at v. 2a and v. 27. Beloved, Heaven would not be Heaven if all of the wickedness of this old world was somehow still up there, would it? John writes in his first epistle that the whole world lies in wickedness (1 John. 5:19). And if you are a spiritually sensitive believer in Jesus then you are oppressed by this wickedness almost everywhere you go. The Bible tells us that that's how it was with even old backslidden Lot, that his righteous soul was tormented by wickedness of Sodom day by day (2 Peter 2:7-8). And if you are spiritually sensitive, when you go Christmas shopping you are oppressed by the materialism that reeks in the air. If you go to an Alabama football game you are oppressed by the drinking and the cursing and the worship of human beings. When you drive down the interstate you are oppressed by the billboards that glorify sex and gambling. And if for some exceptional reason you happen to be out of church on Sunday and in town, you are oppressed by so many people who are out shopping or jogging and treating Sunday as any other day of the week.

What if all of that still went on in Heaven? Well beloved, praise God, I can tell you that it will not! Despite Rob Bell's new book Love Wins, which strongly implies that everyone goes to Heaven, God's blessed old Book says otherwise. Look at v. 8. Friends, it doesn't getter any plainer than that does it? In Heaven you'll not worry about living next to a murderer or dope dealer or sex pervert. And you'll also know that your neighbor will never deceive you, or gossip about you, or get angry with you. And here's something else. In Heaven your neighbor won't ever worry about you doing these things to him. Because only those who've been redeemed from these sins, whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life will be in Heaven. And all who commit such sins or anything else that harms themselves or their neighbor will be in the lake of fire. For Heaven is a place of **unmixed purity**.

Now, I'd like to throw out a thought before we move on. Doesn't the thoughts of living in such a righteous and peaceful place just give you a little more of a desire to go to Heaven? It surely does me. But do you know what God would desire for

everyone of us? He would desire that as much as possible, we live with just a little taste of Heaven on earth!! And where do we enjoy such a taste? First of all in our godly homes, where the husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church, and where the wife submits to her husband's godly leadership, and where they submit themselves one to another in their personal desires. And where parents love and discipline their children and bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, instead of letting X-boxes, play stations, karate, soccer, gymnastics, football, softball or other things take priority over their spiritual lives and God's church. And where children obey and respect their parents. That's how to have a little bit of Heaven on earth.

But there's another place where God would have us experience just a little taste of Heaven ahead of time. And that is in His church! Where we come together on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night and love on each other and comfort each other and encourage each other in our walk with Christ. Beloved, we get beat up enough six days a week by the world! And God says to us, "Let the church be different! Let it be a haven of rest for the weary and a training ground for the Christian soldier!" So I say to you this morning, let's all get in some good Heaven practice starting right now!! Let's make Grant's Creek a place where the righteousness of Jesus is manifested in every life and where the love of Jesus flows like a mighty river between every one of us. How sweet that would be! And let us go home and do the same.

We have seen that Heaven is a place of **unhindered intimacy**, and **unrestrained glory**, and **unmixed purity**. And finally I want us to see that Heaven is a place of **unfathomed eternity**. Look at 22:5. Now, the last phrase of that verse, "forever and ever", is a blessing for some and troublesome for others. Science fiction author Isaac Asimov expressed it this way: I don't believe in the afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even worse. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think that the boredom of heaven would be even worse". Well, Mr. Asimov was obviously dead wrong, but he did express a concern that even some Christians have. How in the world can life for all eternity, no matter how good it is, not become boring? Or how can being perfect not become boring? Like someone said, if you played golf in Heaven, wouldn't you get tired of hitting a hole in one every time you teed up?

Well beloved, the fact is, Heaven won't be boring for one reason – and that is, God is not a boring God! Think about the earth that God created. It is boring? Even after the Fall of man, in its sin-cursed state, the wonders of this world never cease to amaze us. Is a gorgeous sunset ever boring to you? What about a field full of beautiful flowers that burst forth in the Spring? And after 6000 years of study and exploration, scientists learn new things about this world and the worlds beyond

almost every day. So won't the wonders of God's perfect Heaven be infinitely more in number, and infinitely more amazing?

And what about all the people that you'll want to get to know in Heaven? After you've spent about 10 billion years sitting at Jesus' feet, don't you think you're going to want to spend at least another billion with your former family on earth, and after that spend time getting to know Peter, James, and John, and Paul and Daniel and all the other saints of old? And being a sports fan, I want to look up Tim Tebow and Albert Pujols and Bobby Bowden and many others and thank them for being such strong witnesses for Christ while they were here on earth. And that's not counting all the other billions and billions of other family members you will want to get to know.

There's another reason that I know that Heaven will not ever be boring. Look at 22:3. Let me ask you, when you are in the center of God's will, serving Jesus, is it ever boring? A thousand times NO!! Serving Jesus in the center of His will by the power of His Spirit is the most exciting thing in the world!! So how could serving Him, **always** in the center of His will, **always** filled with His Spirit, **always** 100% successful in our service – how could that be anything less than the most exciting thing in the world?

But let me tell you the ultimate reason you'll never get bored in Heaven. It is found in one little phrase in ch. 21:5 – “Behold, I make all things new”. God in His infinite power will make everything you touch, see, and hear forever and ever just as exciting as the time you touched it, saw it, or heard it for the first time. Ladies, how do you feel when you put on a brand new dress that you just love? Well, every day in heaven you'll put on a brand new dress and feel the same way. Men, how do you feel when you sit down behind the wheel of your brand new truck? Well, in heaven you'll get the same rush every single day! And how did it feel, young person, the day you held the hand of your honey for the first time? Was that boring? Did you yawn at the same time? Now, of course I'm spiritualizing just a bit here. But you get the point. Every single day in Heaven, when you see the face of Jesus, your love for Him will be new and fresh and just as passionate as the day you arrived and He hugged you and said, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

Well friends, our time is gone, and I feel like a man trying to empty the ocean with a thimble, for that's how vast and deep are the truths about Heaven. But the highest concern for every one of us today is not, “Do I know all about Heaven”, but, “Am I going to Heaven?” Are you going to Heaven? There is only one way. God said in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men under heaven by which we must be saved”, and that is the name of Jesus. Do you know without a doubt that you have ever come to understand your lost condition before God, that you were on the pathway to hell, and then placed your faith in Christ alone as your Savior and Lord? If not, Jesus promises to save you if

you'll come to Him today, and then you can know for certain that Heaven is your eternal home! Won't you come to Him today?