

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The New Heaven and the New Earth, Part 1

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-3

Code: 66-80

I think throughout the history of the church, heaven has been a preoccupation of God's people. Many songs have focused on heaven. Because people through the years in the life of the church have been loosely tied to earth and so they have longed for heaven. I suppose even this time in the history of the world around the globe where Christians don't have it as comfortably as we do, there is still a great anticipation for heaven.

Most Christians, I suppose, through the centuries could say with the psalmist in Psalm 73, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and besides Thee I desire nothing on earth." That is the expression of the heart that longs for God. Much like Psalm 42 where the psalmist says, "As the deer pants after the water brook, so pants my soul after Thee, O God." The psalmist in the same Psalm 73 said, "Nearness to God is my good." He said, "God is my portion forever." Being preoccupied with the person of God, longing to be in the presence of God was on the heart of Christians.

In fact, the pure in heart, according to the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes, are promised that they will some day see God. Through the centuries that desire to see God, to be in God's presence, to enjoy God forever, that desire that there is nothing in the world that can satisfy has been on the hearts of believers. But it's not so in this culture.

Not in this society in which we live in the western world. We are living in a society of instant gratification, material comfort and endless indulgences. And the church has become worldly. Nothing demonstrates that, I don't think, anymore graphically than the lack of interest in heaven. Most Christians are, to some degree or another, more interested in laying up treasure on earth than in heaven. They're more concerned with their investments and their retirement package and their own future on earth than they are with heaven. I suppose most Christians sacrifice the eternal blessing of glory on the altar of temporal gratification. We don't talk about heaven much. We don't sing about heaven much because we're really not that interested.

The old song said "heaven on my mind," but that's not really true anymore. Because believers do not have heaven on their minds, they waste their lives, they hinder the power of the church and they are consumed with fading things.

We could address this issue of having lost the heavenly perspective from a number of passages. We could talk about Paul's words to the Philippians in which he reminds them and us that our citizenship

is in heaven, chapter 3 verse 20 and that we are waiting for the One who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, or we might even look at Colossians 3 where it says, "Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth." Or we might even study 1 John 2:15 to 17 where it says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of God but is of the world and the world passes away." We could even study the passage in James where James says, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God."

You see, everything connected to our spiritual life and destiny is in heaven. Our Father is there. Our Savior is there. Our Comforter is there. Our fellow believers are there. Our name is there, our life is there, our inheritance is there, our home is there, our citizenship is there, our reward is there, our treasure is there. Everything that belongs to us is there.

Consequently, Paul told the Romans that they should be rejoicing in hope. That they closer they are to heaven the more joy they should experience. I don't know that we see that. I see even Christians close to heaven trying desperately to hold on to this life. But the preacher in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 1 was right. He didn't intend it this way but he was right when he said, "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth," and that is true for a Christian. And though he may have approached it cynically, what he said was indeed truth. It is better to die than to be born because to die for a believer is to enter into a better place than birth ushers us into. The Apostle Paul understood that when he said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Therein he voiced his perspective.

The reason we should have a longing for heaven is because God is there. And whom have we in heaven but Him? And whom do we desire on earth but Him? He should be our supreme affection, our supreme love, our supreme desire. And if He's in heaven then heaven should be the place we long to be.

In 1 Kings chapter 8, eight times it says that God is in heaven. And if indeed He is the supreme object of our affection, if He is our great love, if we love the Lord our God in any proximity to loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then we would long to be in heaven with Him. And we would say with the psalmist, "I desire nothing on earth but You and whom have I in heaven but You." I want to be there because You're there, not because my friends are there, not because my family is there, not because my relatives are there but because You're there.

This has a powerful effect on our lives, to desire heaven. And frankly, we could wish that we lived in a less comfortable culture, we could even wish that we lived in a poor culture, we could wish that we lived in a persecuted culture so the world would not seem so good to us and heaven would seem so much better.

In 1 John chapter 3 the first two verses, John says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God and such we are. For this reason the world doesn't know us because it didn't know Him. Beloved, now are we the children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is." That's the attraction of heaven, we'll see Him just as He is...no more veil, no more distance, no more mystery, the complete revelation of God. And then John says in verse 3, "He that has this hope in Him purifies himself." It purges your life to hope for heaven.

John Bunyan writing in that marvelous Pilgrim's Progress which demonstrates such genius in making the Christian life into a graphic illustration or allegory has a conversation between two pilgrims who are on their way to the celestial city, which, of course, is heaven. One of the two pilgrims says to the other, "When do you find yourself in the most wholesome and most vigorous spiritual state?" To which the other pilgrim says, "When I think of the place to which I am going." Bunyan understood that. When he wrote that he understood that heaven on your mind changes your life. The living in a joyous anticipation of the presence of God changes everything.

Sadly, I suppose most Christians are more like the cynical Mark Twain who when told about heaven remarked flippantly, "You take heaven, I'd rather go to Bermuda."

A true and vivid longing for heaven has many marvelous implications and many marvelous benefits. A true and vivid longing for heaven, for example, is an evidence of genuine salvation because when a person longs for heaven, you know they're longing for God. They're demonstrating love for the Lord. They're showing you where their heart is.

And not only that, where you see a strong longing for heaven there is incentive to the highest excellence of Christian character. Why? Because anyone who loves heaven and anyone who longs for heaven and anyone who seeks that which is above and anyone whose heart is in heaven is one who loves to commune with the living God, one who travels there in meditation, who travels there in devotion, who travels there in prayer, who travels there in study, and that's a purging fellowship.

Furthermore, a true and vivid longing for heaven is the truest path to a life of joy because if you're really living in heaven and if all your anticipation is there and you recognize that that is the great desire of your heart, then you can endure absolutely anything in this life and never have your joy affected. What does it matter what happens here in view of heaven's glories?

Furthermore, a true and vivid anticipation of heaven is the best preservative against sin because the more heavenly minded you are the less likely you are to stoop to the degrading level of the world. The more you set your affections on things above, the less likely you are to follow fleshly impulses.

Furthermore, a true and vivid longing for heaven will maintain the vigor of your spiritual service. Those Christians who run slow, those Christians who work little, those Christians who make a minimal effort at serving God demonstrate little regard for eternal things. Many of them work very hard at earthly things and very little at eternal things. Why? Because they in their minds have designed that the prize to be gained here is more worthy of their effort than the prize to be gained there. What a deception. You see, fervency in service, diligence in service, faithfulness in service is related to anticipation of heavenly benefit. I ask myself that constantly...what is the heavenly benefit of my life? What will be the heavenly benefit of that endeavor? What does it matter for eternity?

Furthermore, a true and vivid longing for heaven honors God above everything else because when your heart is in heaven it is because He is there and He is the supreme One. And a true devotion and longing for heaven also repays God's goodness. You say, "In what sense?" Well, when we set our affections on things above, in a sense we have given back to God what He has given us because His heart is always set on us, and certainly ours should be set on Him.

So when you want to find an evidence of genuine salvation in someone's life and when you want to find a motive or incentive to the highest excellence of Christian virtue, and when you're looking for someone who has true joy, someone who can stand against temptation, someone who maintains the vigor and diligence of spiritual service, someone who honors God above everything else and someone who wants to repay God for His goodness, you're going to find somebody whose heart is in heaven. The noblest of all Christians, the godliest of all saints, the most virtuest of all believers are going to be heavenly minded and they're going to life in the life of eternity.

So when we talk about heaven in our study of the book of Revelation, having come to chapters 21 and 22, we're not just talking about pie in the sky, we're talking about something that has immense implications for how we live our lives. And, frankly, we're talking about something that should bring great conviction. It does disturb me, I confess, that every single seat in this church isn't filled and people pressing against the doors on the outside. It should be enough to announce we're going to talk about heaven that every believer would be here, if he had to paddle his own boat. In some places in our world even today that would be the case where people have suffered much and where they love God much.

And so, as we come to the closing two chapters of the book of Revelation after all these months and even several years of study, we come now to the subject of heaven. And my prayer is it will rekindle the fires in every heart, the fires of preoccupation with the land of glory which awaits us.

Let's get some foundational data first, okay? Heaven is referred to 550 times or so in Scripture. Heaven is referred to 54 times in the book of Revelation. The Old Testament Hebrew word is shamayim, it means the heights. The New Testament word is ouranos from which we get the planet Uranus. It means that which is elevated, that which is lifted up, that which is raised up. Heaven is the

raised up place, the heights.

Scripture simply delineates three heavens. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 it says Paul was taken up into the third heaven, that's the heaven where God dwells, that's the third heaven. The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven, that's the atmosphere around the earth, that's the air we breathe. The second heaven is the stratospheric heaven, that's the heaven of the heavenly bodies, the planets, the stars, the moons and everything else. And when you've gone through the atmospheric heavens and you've gone through the stratospheric heavens and come to the last heaven, it's the heaven of God, it's the divine heaven, the abode of God and angels and saints.

And people have asked throughout the centuries: where is it? Where is it? We believe it's a place because there are some people there who actually have bodies. Is that not true? Like Enoch who took a walk one day and walked right up to heaven. And the prophet Elijah who went to heaven in a chariot. And the Lord Jesus Christ who is there in a glorified body. And there's going to be a lot more people there in their glorified bodies because Jesus said in John 14 He went to prepare a place for us and some day He'll come and bring us there. And when He does bring us, according to 1 Thessalonians, our body is going to be transformed, we're going to get a new body to go into that heavenly place. It's a place.

You say, "Isn't it just sort of a spiritual consciousness?" No, it's a place. It's a place where the spiritual and the transcendent glorified bodies of the saints will dwell with the glorified Christ and the holy angels.

Now exactly where it is is not given, we just know one...one detail, it's up, that's all we know. You say, "How do you know it's up?" Because that's what the Bible says. In Revelation, for example, chapter 4 verse 1, "After these things," John writes, "and behold standing open in heaven, I looked and saw the door and the first voice I heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, Come up here." So, from where John was standing, heaven was up. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 1 to 4 Paul says he was caught up into the third heaven. It's up.

Now I know the next question: how far up? Well, we've got to get through the atmospheric heaven and we've got to get through the stratospheric heaven, although we could conclude that heaven is in a completely different dimension, and thus is very near. I'll say more about that. But let's just assume that we go through the atmospheric heaven and the stratospheric heaven to get to the up where the true heaven is. The moon is 211,463 miles, you could walk to it in 27 years if you could walk 24 miles a day, it's not that far. Now if we could just crank up your speed a little bit to like 186,000 miles per second, you could get to the moon in a second and a half, which is really the better way to go if you're going to take the trip. At that speed you could reach Jupiter in 35 minutes and 11 seconds cause it's only 367 million miles away. And if you could go 186,000 miles per second you could get to Saturn in 7...in one hour and 11 seconds cause it's only 790 million miles away. Now

remember, you've got to go 186,000 miles a second to get there in a hour and 11 seconds.

But you see, when you've gotten to Saturn and you've gone beyond, and you've even gotten to Pluto which is in to the billions of miles away, when you've arrived at the very extremity of what we know is our solar system, you haven't even gotten out of the front yard. You're still at the very, very beginning of the stratospheric heaven because Alpha Centauri which is a star is 20 billion light years away, the North Star...420 billion miles away, I should say...the North Star, 400 billion. And then a star Betelgeuse, 880 quad drillion miles away. And by the way, it's big. They have discovered it has a 200 million mile diameter. And you want to know something? When you get there, you're still in our galaxy and there are billions of galaxies.

And they say that our galaxy probably has a diameter of 100,000 light years, that's going at the rate of 186,000 miles a second for a year. And when you've gotten through our galaxy there are billions more. So when we say "up," it is up.

You say, "Well, it must take a long time to get there." Luke 23:43 Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "In 100,000 light years you'll be with Me in Paradise." Is that what He said? He said what? Isn't that amazing? And the Apostle Paul said, "Absent from the body, (snap), present with the Lord." Second Corinthians 5:8, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." Oh in a sense it's outside the created order as we know it, it's in a different dimension than time and space and so it's a little facetious to assume that it's miles away, but you understand that the great heaven of God is way beyond the created world and yet we can be there in a split second. In fact, when the Rapture comes it's going to happen in a twinkling of an eye, that doesn't mean a blink, that's different. Twinkling means the light...the time it takes for light to refract off your pupil.

And what do we know about heaven? Well only what the Bible says. Ezekiel tried, we give him credit, tried to explain it in chapter 1. I'm not going to read it to you because it's...you can read it yourself. He talked about storms and he talked about fire flashing and jewels and metal and glowing metal and living creatures and bronze and spinning wheels inside of wheels. From verse 4 down through 28 he gave his best effort at describing the indescribable.

And Paul went there and came back in 2 Corinthians 12. And sad to say, the Lord didn't let him tell about it because he says he was not allowed to describe it.

So Ezekiel is giving us a description that's very hard to comprehend...shining, brilliant, blazing, glorious light and jewels. Paul doesn't even get to tell us what he saw. So the best look at it is here in John's revelation. We're going to get the best glimpse of heaven anywhere in Scripture here in chapter 21 verse 1 down through chapter 22 verse 5. This is a monumental text of Scripture then because it describes for us our future home.

Now remember, Jesus said in John 14 that He was going to go away and prepare a place for us, and this is the place He prepared for us. And we'll see how that fits together in a moment. Let's turn to chapter 21 and at least for tonight we'll take a shot at the first three verses.

"And 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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them.'"

Now, friends, that is enough for me to preach on for months. It is so glorious. But let me just give you three features that come out of these verses.

First of all, the appearance, or the vision of the new heaven and the new earth. Let's call it the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth. Verse 1, "And 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."

Now remember, as this chapter opens, let me just give you a fast review, as this chapter opens in the chronology of end times, all the sinners of all the ages, demons and men, including Satan, the false prophet, the Antichrist and everybody else are now in the eternal Lake of Fire. They are out of the presence of God and the saints and the holy angels forever. They have been dismissed into their own disconnected isolated place of eternal punishment. They are gone from the presence of God, the saints and angels forever.

Additionally, the whole universe as we know it, the entire universe, all the way out to endless space through all the billions and billions of light years that make up the stratospheric heavens, all of it has been destroyed. All of it has been reduced to energy. All the matter that makes up the entire universe has been reduced to energy.

So the universe as we know it is gone. And all the ungodly are gone. And God then takes the holy angels and the godly of all the ages and creates for them a new universe which is to be the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed and of the angels who worship God.

This is what Ephesians 1:10 has in mind when it says, "The fullness of times has come." That is the summing up of all things, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, Ephesians 1:10. This is it. This is the eternal state. This will exist forever and forever.

Let's look at the verse, "And I saw," I have to stop at that phrase. That little phrase is a technical phrase, this is the seventh time it's been used since chapter 19 verse 11. Chapter 19 verse 11, "I

saw heaven opened and then Christ comes," this is the seventh time that same little phrase is used. It's a very important phrase because I think it is used to take us step by step through the chronology of the coming of Christ. It is used when the Lord returns. It is then used at the defeat of Antichrist. It is then used to introduce the banishment of Satan at the outset of the Kingdom. It is then used at the introduction of the Kingdom, the millennial Kingdom. It is used at the opening of the release and the destruction of Satan. It is used to introduce the scene at the Great White Throne. And here for the seventh time it is used to introduce the new heaven and the new earth. It's a technical phrase that introduces each of the sequential events from the return of Christ to the establishment of the eternal state. And here is its seventh use. We'll see the eighth use in the next verse. As you can see verse 2 begins with the same phrase, "And I saw."

But here in the seventh use, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Following the Lord's return, following the defeat of Antichrist, following the banishment of Satan at the beginning of the Kingdom, following the Kingdom, following the release of Satan and his destruction, following the Great White Throne comes the new heaven and the new earth. And there you have the sequence, the eschatological sequence leading up to the eternal state, signaled by the little phrase "and I saw."

And what did he see? A new heaven and a new earth. Now this terminology is drawn from the Old Testament. And I just remind you of two Scriptures, Isaiah 65:17, "For behold, God said through the prophet Isaiah, I create new heavens and a new earth and so new that the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." People ask, "When you get to heaven, will you remember what went on down here?" What's the answer? No. Because if you could remember, you would remember things that are tainted with...what?...sin. "Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create."

Then in Isaiah 66:22, "Just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me, declares the Lord, so your offspring and your name will endure." And again there twice Isaiah refers to the new heaven and the new earth. And so John is taking that phrase right...right from, as it were, the pen of the prophet. What Isaiah had predicted is now a reality in the vision that John is having.

So there's coming a new heaven and a new earth. And I say to you what I've said all the way along, the earth we live on is temporary, disposable. We're not to preserve it, that's pointless. I'm not saying that you are indiscriminate in how you care for the resources around you. I'm not saying that you should wantonly pollute the world and make life difficult and things like that. But I am saying the idea of preserving this world runs contrary to the plan of God. It is disposable, it is unraveling, it is declining, it is winding down. The law of entropy which says that matter is always breaking down and tending toward disorder is indeed occurring. And consequently we are living on a disposable planet. God does not intend for it to remain. The goals of all those who want to save the earth, to save-the-planet people are really wasting their time because this one will be replaced by an eternal new heaven and new earth. In fact, the earth is not headed for an ecological crisis. I want to take that

burden off your back, the earth is not headed for an ecological crisis, it is not headed for an ecological holocaust, it is headed for an eschatological holocaust.

Now the word "new" is important. It's not the word neos which means new as opposed to old, it's the word kainos which means new in quality, it measures not the timeliness of something being new or the fact that it is new on the calendar, it is new to this period of time, but simply that it is new in quality. It is fresh. It is different. There's coming a different heaven and earth. Yes it is new in terms of chronology, but it is...the point that the writer is making here is that it is new in terms of kind, it's different, the quality of it is completely different from the one we now know. And we won't even have any remembrance of the one that now exists. God originally made the universe and the earth, I believe, to be the permanent home for mankind. And Eden would have been his permanent home and he would have lived forever, except that men and women sinned in the Garden. Sin and death entered in, corrupted the world and the universe. The fall of angels, of course, added to the corruption. The earth became a place that had to be destroyed. Decay entered it. It started unraveling and decaying and ultimately God has to wipe it out.

There will come a new heaven, think about it. A heaven with no more tempests, a heaven with no more storms, no more fierce winds, no more thunder, no more rain and no more demons and devils roaming. And there will be a new earth with no miseries of godlessness, no longer smarting under the curse. And earth whose forever hills will flow with holiness and the river of salvation and whose eternal valleys know only the peace of the paradise of God. This has to happen. There has to be a new heaven and a new earth. Why? Back to verse 1, "For the first heaven and the first earth passed away." That was described back in chapter 20 verse 11. "I saw a Great White Throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them." At that point we discussed the fact that the universe goes out of existence when God gathers the ungodly at the Great White Throne and then sends them in to the Lake of Fire.

And because the universe is gone, He has to create a new one. The heavens and earth that we now know must be destroyed. You remember how the Old Testament prophets said the heavens are not pure in His sight, Job 15:15. That was true. Leviticus 18:25, "The land has become defiled." Isaiah 24:5, "The earth is polluted." And consequently the psalmist writing in Psalm 102 wrote, "Of old Thou didst found the earth and the heavens are the work of Thy hands, even they will perish but Thou doest endure and all of them will wear out like a garment, like clothing Thou wilt change them and they will be changed." The old clothing a new garment will come. And by the way, that identical passage is quoted in Hebrews chapter 1 verses 10 to 12, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, the heavens are the work of Thy hands, they will perish but Thou remainest." Jesus said in Luke 21, "Heaven and earth will pass away."

So because heaven and earth, as we know it, this whole massive universe will be uncreated. And when you think about the creation of it, I mean, think about the creation of a universe where you can

go 880 quad-drillion miles, reach a star 200 million miles in diameter and still be in your galaxy and there are billions more galaxies beyond it. Imagine that massive universe being uncreated. And then in its place a new heaven and a new earth.

You say, "What's it going to be like?" He only gives us one clue, end of verse 1, just...this is the only clue, "There's no longer any sea." Humph, you say, "Is that a clue?" Yeah, there's no longer any sea, that's all he says.

Now that means it's going to be different because three quarters of the earth's surface is covered with what? Water. And you know something, I want to announce to you that you're mostly water. Did you know that? Your blood is 90 percent water and your flesh is 65 percent water.

This then, this world in which we live is basically a watery world. There's not only water in the oceans, there's water in the land. And we're water and plants are mostly water and animals are mostly water, and the earth...did you know?...is the only place in the known universe where there's water enough to sustain man, plants and animals. Tell me that's evolution. It can't be.

The sea is emblematic of a water-based environment. Man's existence is water based. You'd die if you get dehydrated. So what is he saying here? Well, what he's saying is the new heaven and the new earth don't operate on water anymore. Now that's enough to tell you it's going to be different. No more evaporation, distillation and condensation. New climatic conditions. And whatever we are in our glorified form is not going to depend on a process that demands consumption of water. The new heaven and the whole new universe isn't going to have to have a whole lot of oceans, it won't have to have any, it won't have any. So in our glorified form, no water is needed.

You say, "Well, is there going to be any water at all there? I might get thirsty even there in heaven." Well you probably won't but in Revelation 22 it says, "He showed me a river of the water of life," that's the only water, it's not the H₂O kind, it's the water of...what? Life.

So whatever...whatever the water of life is is what gives us life but it's not the kind of water we know, it's not a chemical called H₂O. You say, "Well why does he say that?" Just to point out that it's different. And that's about as profound a way to express its difference from the physical standpoint as any way he could say it because if there's no water there and there's no sea there, then life is going to be so completely different than anything we could even understand in its glorified form. The eternal state is totally different.

So, verse 1, the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth and I can't tell you anymore than that, folks, because that's all there is there. First Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says there's a body terrestrial, that is an earthly one, and there's a body celestial, a body in the glory, and they're different. We will be literally raised, we will be literally given resurrection bodies, we will dwell in an

eternally new heaven and earth that will be based on a completely different life principle than what we know now in this created universe.

Now let's move to the second point. He starts out with the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth, and then secondly, the capital of the new heaven and new earth, the capital. Verse 2, and here is the eighth use of this little phrase, taking us to the next in the sequence of visions, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

Now here we are introduced to the capital city of heaven which is the new Jerusalem. Now you want to mark something in your own mind, the new Jerusalem isn't all there is to heaven because later on in the chapter we're going to find out just exactly how large the new Jerusalem is. It is even measured out down there in verse 16 as 1500 miles cubed. But you've got a whole new heaven and new earth, a whole new created realm that is vast, that is infinite, that is eternal and in the middle of it you have a capital city called the new Jerusalem which is 1500 miles cubed. You say, "Are you sure this is literal?" Well if it isn't, I haven't got any idea what he's talking about cause if you ask me to accept this as something that's not literal, then how am I going to know what it is? You read commentators who say, "Well he doesn't really mean a real city." Well what does he mean? It says "city." And who is going to unravel the mystery of what he means when he doesn't say what he means? It says here there was a holy city called new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. So you know what I conclude? There was a holy city called the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. And that's what John saw.

Notice "the holy city, new Jerusalem," there are three Jerusalems, really, in redemptive history. There's the old city of Jerusalem, the historic Jerusalem, the old city of David the Jebusites once occupied in the land of Palestine, that city that still exists today and can be visited. People live there. There is that city, that old city of Jerusalem, that historic city. And by the way, even as the historic Jerusalem it is called the holy city. That's right. It is referred to in the Old Testament, Isaiah 52:1; Nehemiah 11:1; Daniel 9:24. It is referred to in the New Testament, Matthew 4:5; Matthew 27:53; Revelation 11:2. It is referred to, the historic city, as the holy city. What that means is not that everybody that's in it is holy but that it was set apart unto God. It was set apart for divine purposes. It was to be devoted to God. It's not that everybody in it was holy or is holy or will be holy. Eventually it will become the seat of Antichrist's desecration and the raising of false worship of him. So it's holy in the sense that God set it apart for divine purposes. But obviously nothing beyond that.

The millennial Jerusalem which will come during the thousand-year period will be holy as well because Christ will sit on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem and rule with a rod of iron. And so there will be a greater holiness to that city as Christ, the holy One, reigns there and maintains order through swift judgment.

But this is not the historic old Jerusalem and this is not the millennial Jerusalem, this is the eternal city. It is called the holy city, new Jerusalem. And this is holy not because it is set apart to God, not because Christ is there, but it is holy now because every person in it is perfectly holy. And so Jerusalem would have gone from a holiness by virtue of being devoted to God to a holiness by virtue of being ruled by Christ to a holiness by virtue by being occupied only by holy people. Everyone in it will be perfectly holy. Chapter 20 verse 6 of Revelation, "Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection that takes people to heaven."

Now it's hard to imagine a holy city, isn't it? Certainly Los Angeles wouldn't qualify. The world's cities, in fact just the opposite of being holy, of all of human society the most unholy is in the cities, isn't it? The world's cities are pockets of wickedness, pockets of unholy living and unholy thinking. The world's cities are the real symbol of decay and decadence and immorality and crime, pollution. The world's cities are a swamp of sin and iniquity, corruption, graft, thievery from New York to Tokyo, from Los Angeles to Moscow, from Rio to Paris. We don't know anything about a holy city, but this city is the holy city, the sinless capital city of eternity where everybody who lives in it is perfectly holy. And the idea of a city talks about relationships and activity, it talks about responsibility, unity, socialization, harmony, communion, living together, doing things, cooperating. And I think the Lord is showing us it will have everything a city has in terms of people living together and working together and serving together and the difference will be they will all be godly.

In Revelation 3:12 this city was first mentioned in the book of Revelation. And the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God and he says it's promised to those who are overcomers. But there is the same description. It is the city called new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. Hebrews talks about this. Do you remember Hebrews chapter 11? It says that Abraham was looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God. What do you think he was looking for? He was looking for what? For heaven. In chapter 12 of Hebrews verse 22, "You have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where there are myriads of angels and the general assembly and church of the firstborn are enrolled in heaven." And God is there, the judge of all, and the spirits of righteous men made perfect are there and Jesus is there, that's all in Hebrews 12:22 to 24. This heavenly Jerusalem where the angels are and the saints are and God is and Jesus is, that's the new Jerusalem.

Abraham looked for that city and one day went there. And all of the saints that have died are gone there now and they're there in their spirits. It's that city. I think the best way to understand this, beloved, is that anybody who dies, any saint who dies goes to the heavenly Jerusalem...that heaven is the heavenly Jerusalem. In fact, we could say that all heaven is contained currently in the heavenly Jerusalem because the universe as it exists, which is an infinite universe, is touched and stained by sin. So until there is created a new heaven and a new earth, heaven doesn't fill all of infinity.

To put it another way, think of John 14 and I think this will begin to pull some things together in your mind, I know it does in mine. In John 14 Jesus, of course, was telling His disciples He was going to leave. And you remember the little talk He had, "Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe in Me. In My Father's house..." What's that? "Well, My Father has a house and in that house are many rooms, I'm going to get your room ready and then I'm going to come and get you and take you there."

I believe Jesus left the earth, went back to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city who has...that has a foundation whose builder and maker is God...He went back to the heavenly Jerusalem where there are just men whose spirits are there and the angels are there and God is there and, of course, Christ is there, and He went back there to prepare a place for us. And some day He's going to bring us to that place. It's important then to see that the new Jerusalem exists even now in some form, it's really heaven, it's where God is. And when a believer dies, they go to the place the Lord has for them. But some day when God creates a whole new infinite universe, that heaven, that third heaven, that Father's house, that new Jerusalem, that city whose builder and maker is God is going to come down and descend into the midst of the new universe. And it will be the home of all the godly, it will be where we dwell cause we're not...you're not saying, "I'm living on Pluto and you're living over on Saturn and somebody else is living over in some galaxy somewhere..." We're all in the Father's...what?...house. And so we'll all live in the city, we can just go anywhere we want but home will be the new Jerusalem. All the glorified of all the ages will live in that city because they'll all live in the Father's house where Jesus is gone. And if He's gone now...listen carefully...if He's gone there now to prepare a place now, it has to be being prepared in a place that now exists. And the new heaven and the new earth don't now exist. Do you understand what I'm saying?

That's why the Scripture is so clear that the time is going to come in the end when God creates a new heaven and a new earth, a whole new universe and down from Him into that new universe will descend the heavenly city. Coming down from God out of heaven. In fact, in chapter 21, look down at verse 10, "He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down...Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God," that's a third time it says that, back in chapter 3 and here twice, that this comes down. It indicates to me that it doesn't come into existence, it just descends from God into the new heaven and the new earth. Now that's just a technicality but I think it shows you the explicit nature of the description here. The Lord is now preparing a place for us in the Father's house, the Father's house is in the heavenly Jerusalem, or heaven as we know it, and some day the whole thing will descend into the eternal state, the new universe.

It is from God. What does that mean? It's a God kind of city. It's a God designed and God made city. He is the architect and He's the builder and it bears all the marks of His holy glory. I'm telling you, when we get down into verse 9 and go through the rest of the description here, you'll see what

that means.

So the heavenly city will have already been prepared. Jesus is preparing it now. And when He comes for His own, He's going to take His own into that place. And when the Rapture of the church occurs, we'll go to that place He's preparing for us and that will be our home and we'll dwell there. Even during the time of the Millennium we'll go back and forth into the earth in glorified form and back to that holy city. And then finally the holy city will become the capital city of eternity.

In further describing the capital city John says in verse 2, "It was made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." He borrows this magnificent imagery of a wedding. Now in Jewish terms there were three parts to a wedding. First was betrothal. And what happened...that's like an engagement only it was real serious. Families got together and they pledged the two young people to one another and it was a binding contract and it was signed and it was settled. And there was a period when the couple did not come together physically together at all during the betrothal.

It was followed by a period or event called the presentation. Presentation was when the bride was brought out and presented, the groom was brought out and there was usually a week of feasting.

The end of the week there was the ceremony. So you had the betrothal, the presentation, the ceremony. And after the ceremony was over you had the consummation. It is that magnificent imagery that you see here. The betrothal took place in eternity past when God wrote the names of His own beloved in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the foundation of the world. The betrothal took place in eternity past when God the Father pledged to give to the Son a redeemed humanity that He would choose. The presentation? The presentation occurred at the Rapture of the church when the bride was taken to be with the bridegroom. And for seven years there would be a wonderful feasting.

At the end of that period the ceremony takes place. You could liken the ceremony to the Millennial Kingdom, the great celebration, the final great feast as the bride and the groom are joined together. And it's followed by the consummation which would be like the eternal state.

So he says I saw the new Jerusalem coming down and it's made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. It's time for the consummation.

Why does he describe the city that way? Because the city contained the bride and so he sees it as the bride's city. You know when the very beginning of God's redemptive plan you know what His purpose was? To go get a bride for His Son, wasn't it? It was to go get a bride for His Son. And He did. And by the time you come to this point in the chronology of Revelation the bride is collected, all the Old Testament saints are incorporated into the final figure of the bride, all the Tribulation saints are incorporated in it, all of those who were converted during the time of the Kingdom, all of the

church is included and they're all in the bridal city, they're all encompassed in the bride that God has chosen for His Son and the city descends with all the redeemed in it into the eternal state.

Back in chapter 19, just briefly, verse 7, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the bright linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and he said to me, These are the true words of God."

When you're studying that in chapter 19, you realize that not everybody who's at that feast, that initial celebration is part of the bride because it says, "Blessed are those invited." So you've got a bride and some invited guests. So when we studied that we pointed very clearly that the bride is the church...the bride is the church. And the picture of Christ being joined to His bride is the picture of Christ being joined to His glorified church. The church is the pure faithful bride, never a harlot like Israel. The church is the bride during the presentation feast in heaven after the Rapture.

But then when the church comes down to earth when Jesus returns and sets up His Kingdom, you come to the full final ceremony of the wedding. I believe then all the saints are collected and gathered in and so the bride becomes all encompassing and so does the bride become all encompassing in the eternal state. So here is the consummation. All things resolved in Christ, all things resolved in the Father. And that's what Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15 where he says, "All things are subjected to Him," verse 28, "the Son Himself will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him that God may be all in all." At the final great event of the ceremony during the Kingdom followed by the consummation, all the saints of all the ages...of all the ages can be brought in to the bride metaphor so that it encompasses all of them.

So John then sees the capital city and it is adorned as a bride because it contains all the redeemed of all the ages who ultimately are the bride that the Father has sought to give to His Son. Marvelous. And the new Jerusalem is a bridal city. The old historic Jerusalem back in chapter 11 verse 8 was called Sodom and Egypt because it was so rotten and so wretched. The Millennial Kingdom didn't reach this level of perfection either and the millennial Jerusalem was besieged by a satanic rebellion, according to chapter 20 verse 3 and following.

So we're dealing here with a new Jerusalem. This is the holy new Jerusalem, more gloriously wonderful than the present Jerusalem as Paul calls it in Galatians 4, or the millennial Jerusalem.

So as we look at heaven then through the eyes of John in his vision we see the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth and the capital city. Then one last point.

We see the supreme personality of the new heaven and the new earth...the supreme personality. And I'm only going to say something brief about this because there's so much to say I want to keep it for next time.

Look at verse 3. "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, `Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and He shall dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them.'" Who is the supreme person of heaven? Who is it? It's God. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee," Psalm 73:25, "And who do I desire on earth but Thee."

I heard a loud voice from the throne...that's about 20 times plus that that phrase has appeared that a loud voice has come out of the throne, probably some angelic announcer. And the announcement is, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men." God no longer is afar off, no longer in a different place. The tabernacle is skene, the place of abode, the place where you live. This is the Father's house. In the new Jerusalem is the Father's house and the Father's house is among His own.

Jesus went away to prepare a place for us in the Father's house so that the Father could come and live in His house with all of us. Behold, amazing, God is living in the same house with men. It's an absolutely unthinkable reality to a Jew who wouldn't even say the name of God because of fearful reverence. And yet a Jew should remember Leviticus 26:11 and 12 says, "I will make My dwelling among you, I will also walk among you and be your God and you shall be My people." And though that had historic import and historic significance, that is nothing compared to its eternal significance. The Immanuel God with us is really with us, not just in human flesh in the form of Jesus Christ, but now Immanuel is with us in all His fullness, no more veiled in flesh, no more in a Holy of Holies in a tabernacle or a temple, no more in a pillar by day or a cloud...a cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night, no more is God transcendent. God comes and makes His home with us, now this is the Father's house and we're all in it together. That is the amazing reality of heaven. "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God."

That means, according to verse 22 of this chapter, look at it, there's no temple. John sees a new Jerusalem and there's no temple. Why? Because the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb ARE the temple. In other words, a temple would indicate that you have to go somewhere to see God, or go somewhere as in the Old Testament to behold the Shekinah, you don't need a temple because you're in God's house. This is so staggering that John's listening to this voice and the voice repeats this thing several times...the tabernacle of God is among men. And the voice says it another way, "And He shall dwell among them." God's going to dwell with His own. And what the psalmist anticipated when he said, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand are pleasures forever," is going to become reality. When it says "dwell" it's the same root as the word tabernacle and it's related to the term for Shekinah, the very presence of God. Shekinah means habitation, Deuteronomy 12:5.

He says it another way. First he says the tabernacle of God is among men. Then he says He shall dwell among them. And then he says, "And they shall be His people." It's almost as if this thing is so mind boggling he has to keep repeating himself. God Himself shall be among them. If he had just said, "He shall dwell among them," they might say, "Well, yes, in His glory and perhaps in a veiled way because He's so great." And when he said, "And they shall...He shall be among them," "Well yes, yes He's going to move in their midst, yes, we understand that." And then he says, "And they shall be His people," personal possession...personal possession.

And then as if that's not enough he adds again, "And God Himself shall be among them." Haven't we already heard that? God Himself is the addition. God is among men. He dwells among them. They are His people. Yes, you heard me right, God Himself. Wow! God appeared in the theophanies of the patriarchal time and God spoke to the prophets audibly and personally. God led His people by day and by night with His presence. God showed them His glory. God came certainly in the flesh of Jesus Christ. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten full of grace and truth. Evidently God who was transfigured before them, in Matthew's gospel 17 it tells about it. God has come to believers in the form of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God has come in the form of the reigning Messiah Jesus Christ in the Millennial Kingdom, but this is God's presence like no other occasion. And this then is the supreme personality of heaven.

We want to be there because God is there. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Who do I care about up there but You, You're the supreme One. First Thessalonians 4 says when the church is raptured we will ever be with the Lord, that is the issue, we will ever be with the Lord. It is being with God that makes heaven heaven. "Father," Jesus prayed in John 17:24, "I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." I want them with Me where I am. What a prayer and it is answered. No intercessors, no mediators, absolute communion with God. No fear, no restraint because there's no sin, eager approach to His holy presence at all times. We'll be really in the presence of God. That is incredible, marvelous, unimaginable, but that is the promise of heaven.

Next Sunday night is going to be communion but I'm going to spend the preparation for communion finishing what I said tonight and showing you what is going to happen when we are in the presence of God in heaven.

Father, thank You for this great hope. Thank You for what You have laid before us. O Father, how awesome it all is. And, Lord, we do pray that You would cause us to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We sap so much strength, so much energy and so many resources fussing about the trivialities of this life, instead of investing our energies and our thoughts in that which is eternal. Thank You for the hope of heaven which enables us to endure anything here in the light of what is to come. Thank You for the hope of heaven which is the greatest incentive to excellence in our Christian character which is the truest path to joy which is the best defense against

sin. Thank You for the hope of heaven which strengthens our spiritual service and causes us to honor you. Help us to live in the light of the glory to come and to treat very lightly this world for there is a far more eternal weight of glory. May we hold lightly to the passing things and feel the true weight of what is eternal.

And should there be anyone in our midst, Lord, anyone who hears this message that is not on the way to heaven, we pray that You would save them by Your grace and turn their course from a course to destruction to a path to glory for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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