

The New Heaven and the New Earth, Part 2

Revelation 21:3

66-81

As we prepare for the Lord's table tonight, I want us to consider the same theme that we've been considering as we move through the book of Revelation and find ourselves now in chapter 21. And to introduce that theme, or reintroduce it to us, I want you to turn to Revelation 21. You remember that last Sunday night we were considering the first three verses of this immensely important revelation. And we came to verse 3. And verse 3 describes the greatest reality about heaven, the greatest reality about the new heaven and the new earth. Verse 3 of Revelation 21 says, "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.'"

The great reality of the eternal state, the great reality of the new heaven and the new earth, the great reality of dwelling in glory in heaven forever is the presence of God. And we considered the words of the psalmist who said, "Whom have I on earth beside Thee? And whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Who expressed that his great longing and his great passion and his great desire was for no other than the Lord Himself.

That's what makes heaven. That's why the Apostle Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ but to die is gain." Gain, why? Well, if "for me to live is Christ," "to die" is gain because I am in the presence of Christ in all His fullness...heaven.

Heaven is that place where we will live with God. Is it any wonder that John said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, to be with You."

When we think about heaven and its attractiveness, well we might consider pearly gates and streets of gold. We might considered...consider the jewels that sparkle with the shining of the glory of God. We might consider the reunion that will occur with beloved redeemed friends, those who are the children of the Redeemer. We might consider that we will be made perfect and out of that perfection will come perfect praise and worship.

But the best and the most glorious reality of heaven is God Himself. And verse 3 simply says, "The tabernacle of God is among men. He shall dwell among them. They shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them."

Now tonight, just briefly, as we prepare for the Lord's table, I want to share with you the very, very important reality of what it's going to be like to live in the presence of God. Let me just give you several features, maybe a handful.

First of all, we will be with Him. And that's what verse 3 is saying initially. We will be with Him. That's

fellowship. And this is the supreme joy of heaven, fellowship with God who pitches His tent, who takes up His residence with us. And if you remember in 1 John chapter 1 verse 3 it says that what we have seen and heard, that's John talking about Christ, we proclaim to you, that's the gospel, in order that you also may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. In heaven the fellowship will be full and unhindered and more wonderful than anything we can ever experience in the fellowship that we enjoy spiritually in this life.

Listen to the words of John 17 verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." In other words, when I come back to You and the glories of Your throne in heaven, I want My own to be there. That's what heaven is, it's really not a place, it's a presence. It's being with Christ where He is.

In John chapter 14 we all know very well the words of Jesus, "In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so I would have told you for I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there You may be also." Always to be with Him, to be with Him. That's what is paradise regained.

Remember the Rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 17 where the Apostle Paul says, after talking about how saints are going to be brought out of the graves and picked up off the earth and meet the Lord in the air and ascend into glory all in the twinkling of an eye as he says to the Corinthians, he caps it off by saying, "Thus we shall ever, or always, be with the Lord." So the highest joy of heaven is not the beauty of the place, although that is wondrous. The highest joy of heaven is not the experience of corporate praise. The highest joy of heaven is not reunion with loved ones who have gone before. The highest joy of heaven is to be with the Lord. That is the crowning joy.

If you go down in chapter 21 of Revelation to verse 22 and 23 it says, "I saw no temple in it," that is in the new Jerusalem which is the capital city of the new heavens and the new earth, he says, "I saw no temple in it for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple." And that is to say God dwells everywhere. It doesn't have to have a temple which is a place where God dwells because all of it is a temple. The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb. All of heaven, all of the new heavens and the new earth and particularly the new Jerusalem is the temple because the presence of God and the presence of Christ is unconfined and fills it all. In heaven there will be no distance, God will not be far off, there will be no sense of removal. Heaven is the place of enjoyment for the full presence of God.

And Richard Baxter, that Puritan writer, said, "As God gives us glorified senses and enlarged capacities in heaven, so will He advance the happiness of those senses to fill up with Himself all those capacities." Eternal, immediate, constant fellowship with God that is intimate, unbroken, satisfying in every respect.

Again Richard Baxter opens to us a wonderful perspective, listen to what he writes. The English is a little archaic but the truth is very, very up-to-date. He writes, "The things of God we handle are divine but our manner of handling them is human. There is little we touch but we leave the print of our fingers behind. The Christian knows by experience that his most immediate joys are his sweetest joys. What have least of man and are most directly from the Spirit. Christians who are in secret prayer and contemplation are those of greatest life and joy because they have all more immediately from God Himself the fullness of joy is in God immediately being present." What he's saying there is

that in times of quiet contemplation, meditation and prayer we draw as near as we can to God and there we find our profoundest joy so the proximity to Him is the source of that.

He goes on, "We shall then have light without a candle and perpetual day without the sun. We shall have enlightened understandings without Scripture and be governed without a written law. We shall have joy which we drew not from promises nor fetched home by faith and hope. We shall have communion without ordinances. To have necessities but no supply is the state of those in hell. To have necessities supplied by means of creatures is the state of those on earth. To have necessities supplied immediately from God is the state of the saints in glory," end quote. No intercessors, no mediators, just the presence of God. Intimate communion with God, intimate communion with Christ. We heard from some of the testimonies tonight that "I didn't know God...I didn't know Christ, but once I came to the Lord Jesus Christ repentant and embraced Him as Savior, now I know God...now I know Christ." And that is only the initial kind of knowing that finds its fullest realization in the glory which is to come.

In fact, to be honest with you, it's sort of comfortable to know God only from a distance. Were we to come too close to Him even though we are His children in our fallen condition, it would be too frightening for us to bear. When Isaiah who was a true believer, the truest of the true in his land, was assaulted, as it were, by the presence of God in the temple as he went to worship and to seek God's face in chapter 6, and when the angels came out and cried antiphonally, "Holy, holy, holy," he was so overwrought with fear that he pronounced a curse and damnation upon himself and said, "Woe is me for I am disintegrating."

When Job was brought face to face with God, closer than he had ever been in his whole life, he said, "I repent in dust and ashes." When Peter realized that he was in the presence of the Creator God who controlled everything in the world because He had just controlled the fish in the Sea of Galilee, Peter realizing that cried out from the depths of his heart, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." And when a sinner, even a redeemed one, gets into proximity with God, it is a frightening, terrorizing experience."

Unholiness is always uncomfortable in the presence of perfect holiness. And so it's...it's okay that...that the intimacy of heaven is reserved for heaven because it would be too frightening for those of us who are even redeemed because of our sinful flesh to get very close to Him. But some day we will. And some day we'll walk up boldly into His presence in the shining of His glory, some day we will take our room in the Father's house and we won't bat an eye and we won't be ashamed and we won't blush and we won't hide our face and we won't turn our eyes and we won't fall on our faces prostrate, we'll be able to look on whatever of the glory of God we can see and feel comfortable joy because we will be holy, with the very holiness of Christ.

So, the glory of heaven is fellowship. We will be with Him. Secondly, the glory of heaven is we will see Him. The tabernacle of God is among men, He'll dwell among them, they'll be His people and God Himself shall be among them. Three times that phrase "among them...among them...among them," we will see the Lord. That's right.

You say, "I thought the Old Testament said no man can see the Lord and live?" It does, Exodus 33. John 1:18, 1 John 4:12 says, "No man has seen God at any time." First Peter 1:8, "We love the One whom we have not seen." And, of course, you remember that the Apostle Paul describing the character of God even says that God is invisible. He is the One who alone possesses immortality,

dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, 1 Timothy 6:16.

If God is invisible, if no one can look on Him, if He is too holy, too pure, too spotless and we are too iniquitous, how is it that we can see Him? Well, remember the words of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 where Jesus said that there are those who will see God. That's the promise from the very mouth of Jesus Himself. And those who see God, He said, have to meet a condition, they have to be pure. The day will come when we will be pure and we will see God. For the time being, all we can see is a veiled glimpse like Moses who saw the glory of God veiled there in Exodus 33, like those who saw Jesus Christ, who saw God veiled in human flesh, like the Apostles on the mount who saw the transfigured Christ and were able to behold something of the glory. They could only see a part but whenever they saw it, now mark this, whenever they saw God they saw light, fire, a bright cloud of light.

In Psalm 104 verse 2 the Bible says God covers Himself with light, as with a garment. God who is spirit cloaks Himself with light. Put it this way, He wears light to be visible because He is the invisible God. He can only be seen when He covers His invisible essence with light. In Exodus 24:17 we read, "The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top." Psalm 36:9, "In Thy light we see light." Whenever anyone has seen God, whether it was on the mount in the Old Testament, Mount Sinai, or whether it was on the mount in the New Testament, the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw light, brilliant, shining, blazing, fiery light. And that is why we think of God as shining glory because that is in fact how He revealed Himself.

But when we are immortal and when we are non-combustible and when we are non-consumable and when we have been made pure there will be nothing in us that can be ignited by the light of God. And so we will be given an eternal and expanded vision of God manifest in light. And that's what we read about in verses 22 and 23, the glory of God illuminates the new heaven and the new earth and blazes its light through the new Jerusalem which is a series of transparent gold streets and a bejeweled city with pearls for gates so that the shining light comes blazing and refracting off of all the jewels and through the gold and off the pearls. When Matthew 5:8 says they shall see God, it uses the term opsoniti(????), they shall be seeing God for themselves, a future continuous reality.

Frankly, in the oriental courts of ancient times, kings were rarely seen. They were secluded and it was a rare privilege to be admitted into the presence of a monarch and to face him. Only very privileged people were able to see the king. To have the privilege to see God for oneself would be an unimaginable privilege. It's hard for us to understand that. We see everybody on television, in the newspapers, in pictures. There was no television, no newspapers and no pictures. If you didn't see somebody face-to-face, you didn't see him. To have the privilege to see God for oneself, the greatest imaginable joy. Psalm 42:1 and 2, "As the deer pants after the water brooks," says the psalmist, "so pants my soul after Thee, O God." And he says, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," and then he adds, "when shall I come and appear before God?"

If you're having trouble desiring heaven it's because you're having trouble desiring to see God. There's nothing here to compare with it. Even the disciples had enough sense to say to Jesus, "Show us the Father, that's what we really want to see, we want to see God." And in this life we don't see Him...not with the eye, we see Him with the mind and the heart, we see Him in history and circumstances, creation, providence, through revelation we see Him in grace and mercy and love. But the day is coming when we'll see Him. Hebrews 12:14 says we'll see the Lord. Revelation 22, look at verse 3, "And there shall no longer be any curse, the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be

in it and His bondservants shall serve Him...verse 4...and they shall see His face." What was forbidden in Exodus 33 is no longer forbidden because as I said earlier, we are non-combustible.

You say, "Does that mean that we will see the immense and eternal and endless infinity of God?" I don't know. But I'll tell you this, we'll see all we can see. And whatever limitations may exist on us as glorified people, we'll be able to see to the limit of our existence of our glorified form.

You say, "Do you think that we'll be able to embrace in our glorified form the full infinity of God?" No, because if we could we would be equal to God and even in our glorified state we won't be, so we perhaps will not see all of His immense infinity but all that our perfect eyes can perceive in perfect holiness we will see. And what we will see will be His being revealed in blazing light.

Now I know you want a preview and you wish I had some slides but I don't have any. So let me give you a...the best shot I can give you and tell you what Ezekiel said. Verse 26 of Ezekiel chapter 1, now he says, "Above the expanse that was over their heads, the heads of angels that he saw, there was something resembling a throne like lapis lazuli..." I love that, it sounds like an Italian meal. Some kind of color, most people think it's some kind of bluish color. "There was lapis lazuli in appearance and on that which resembled a throne, high up was the figure with the appearance of a man and I noticed from the appearance of his loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw something like fire and there was a radiance around him." What's he seeing here? He's seeing something that has some shape and it's sort of shaped like a man only it's just a whole lot of blazing glowing shining fire which radiates.

And verse 28, "As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding rainbow." So coming off the glory of the appearance of God as he sees Him on the throne is fire and from the fire comes light and light defuses into a rainbow of colors. "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." That's the only description we've got. "And when I saw it, I fell on my face."

That's all we know. In chapter 22 of Revelation and verse 5 it says there won't be any night so you won't need any light from a lamp or a sun because the Lord God will illumine everything. Just blazing light.

John Calvin wrote, "Our glory will not be so perfect as to be able to comprehend the Lord in His absolute godhead. Even at the last there will remain an impassable distance between Himself and us," end quote. And yet this is more than we could ever imagine. We will see God face to face. We will literally be engulfed in the glorious light of His presence.

And there's something else. I believe that Christ will be the focal point of the radiating glory of God. This is a guess. What Ezekiel saw in the form of the appearance of a man was very possibly Christ. God is pure spirit but Christ took on the form of a man. But in the glory of that final form He may have appeared to Ezekiel in a preview of what we will see. Shining, fiery, brilliant, blazing light defusing into colors, that will be the glory of God shining through Jesus Christ.

If you think that's amazing, remind yourself that 1 John 3 says that when we see Him we shall be like Him. Wow! What that means is we'll not only see the glory of God face to face, we'll participate in it.

Even now in the process of sanctification, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we're moving from one level of glory to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next and finally we'll enter into the glory of the Lord. And seeing God with our glorified eyes we will be overwhelmed and eternally awed by the effulgence of His manifest light, particularly as it centers and blazes through Jesus Christ and we'll be like Him.

No wonder the psalmist said in Psalm 17:15, "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness." You couldn't behold it any other way. "I will be satisfied with Thy likeness when I awake, I'll see You and I'll be like You."

What satisfies you? I mean, really? A house, a job, a promotion, enough money at the end of the month to pay the bills, entertainment? How about to know God, to see God, to see Him face to face to gaze on His glory to be made like His Son? I mean, who would need to think very long about whether it's better to go or stay? No wonder...no wonder Peter wanted to stay on the Mount of Transfiguration. We give Peter a bad time. Poor guy. I mean, we label him, "The Apostle with the foot-shaped mouth." We continually hear Peter asking stupid questions and always seemingly to be on the wrong side of God's intentions. But can you...can you understand when he saw the blazing glory of God shining through the person of Jesus Christ something like the vision Ezekiel had that he wanted to say, "Hey, guys, this is it! Let's build booths and live here?" Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul who visited heaven and came back said, "Far better to depart and be with Christ?"

Blind Fanny Crosby wrote a song about that. I love it. I don't hear it sung very much. She titled it, "My Savior, first of all." This is how it goes:

When my life work is ended and I cross the swelling
tide, when the bright and glorious morning I shall
see, I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other
side and His smile will be the first to welcome me.
Through the gates to the city in a robe of spotless
white, He will lead me where no tears shall ever
fall, in the glad song of ages I shall mingle with
delight, but I long to meet my Savior first of all.

That's heaven.

So, we'll be with the Lord and we'll see Him. Thirdly, we will adore Him. We will adore Him. Why? Because heaven is a place of worship, it's just worship and worship and worship and worship. That's what we'll do forever and ever and ever. Every time you go into heaven in Revelation, and we've been there a lot, haven't we? We bounced up to heaven in chapter 4 and stayed through chapter 5.

We were bumped up to heaven again in chapter 7 and we returned in chapter 11, went back for a visit in chapter 15 and returned in chapter 19. And now we're back in heaven in chapter 21 and we're going to stay in chapter 22 right there in heaven. And every time we go there what we find is worship...worship. That's what happens in heaven. It's just praise and worship and honor and adoration to God.

So it's very clear on our heavenly occupation. God, you remember, according to John chapter 4, seeks true worshipers who will worship Him. And that is what we will do forever and ever in heaven. Listen to Luke 19:17 to 19, this is Jesus telling the parable that's familiar to us about a nobleman who went on a journey and gave stewardship to his slaves. But in verse 17 of Luke chapter 19 he said to him, "Well done, good slave, because you've been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities. And a second came saying, Your mina, Master, has made five minas...that was the one who made ten. He said to him, You're over five cities." What is this? Well, it appears that heaven is going to be a place where...where authority is going to be given to people.

Now you say, "Well, what...what kind of authority?" Well the only thing I can think of is we get to organize the worship in a certain section. We're sort of in charge. You've been faithful in a little way, now I'm going to give you greater authority, greater leadership. We'll all rise to the level of choir directors, worship leaders. What is heaven? It's where God is going to be, we'll be with Him, we'll see Him, we'll adore Him.

And then I want to add, we will serve Him. We will serve Him. Verse 3 of chapter 22, there no longer will be any curse, the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in this city of new Jerusalem and His bondservants shall serve Him. Doulos latreuo, the verb latreuo translated "serve" means priestly service. It's used back in Revelation chapter 7 also. Our occupation will be to serve...to serve. Verse 15 of Revelation 7 talks about those who have washed their robes, made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they are before the throne of God, they serve Him day and night in His temple. And, of course, His temple fills all of eternity. And so, we're going to worship Him and we're going to serve Him.

You say, "Whoa, you mean there's going to be...you mean we've got to work?" That's right. We will be so creative, we will be more creative than you can ever imagine. We will function to our fully glorified creative capacities. We will have a sense of accomplishment. We will be active. We will be working non-stop, we'll never need to sleep, we'll never need to eat or drink, we will be in a glorified condition. There will never be a night, there will never be a day, it will all be eternal light.

You say, "Well, what will be the nature of our service?" I believe the nature and the extent of our service will reflect our faithfulness in this life. In other words, I believe our eternal capacity for service is the reward for our faithfulness here. What you do to serve the Lord here will determine what you're privileged to do to serve Him there.

Now each of us will be rewarded, 1 Corinthians 4:5, each will receive praise from God, but the rewards will differ. As the Lord sorts out the wood, hay and stubble from the gold, silver and precious stones, He will determine the reward and the reward will be the capacity we have to serve Him.

I don't know about you but I want to serve Him to the greatest extent possible. Just to give you an illustration of what I mean, and I don't want to take the time tonight, I don't have it to give you a

number of them, but just take one, for example. Daniel 12:3, "Those who have wisdom, those who operate wisely will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven." In other words, when you live in this world with spiritual wisdom and when you get in to the next world, you're going to shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven. "And those who lead the many to righteousness are going to shine like stars forever and ever." In other words, eternal shining is connected to faithfulness here.

I really believe that when you go to heaven the Lord is not going to hand you a pile of crowns and you're going to have to go home and find some heavenly carpenter to build you a case to display them. Rather I believe your crown and your reward will be service capacity.

And then one other thing. There's much more that could be said. This is the most astounding thing. When we get into glory and when we see the Lord, we'll have fellowship with Him, we'll see Him, we'll worship Him, we'll serve Him. There's one other thing. I want you to turn to Luke 12 because in Luke 12 verse 35 to 40 is so important. Jesus is giving us some very important words starting in verse 35. "Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps alight. And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes. Truly I say to you...here it is, folks, this is the most astounding thing you will ever read about heaven...Truly I say to you, he will gird himself to serve and have them recline at the table and will come up and wait on them." Is that astounding? It's not astounding that we'll serve Him, what is astounding is...what?...He'll serve us. He'll say, "Sit down at the table while I serve you."

Whether He comes in the second watch or even in the third and finds them, so blessed are those slaves. Be sure of this, that the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he wouldn't have allowed his house to be broken into. You too be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you don't expect.

Jesus takes the imagery of a great lord, a great master returning to his palace and when he finds his slaves serving faithfully in his absence, he serves them. The lord coming back from the journey doesn't seek rest. He doesn't say, "Please make my bed, I'm weary, it's been a long journey, I want to retire for the night." He twists the whole role and makes a feast and he serves his slaves. And this is a picture of what the heavenly Lord will do when we get to heaven. So it's not just us knowing Him and fellowshiping with Him and being with Him and seeing Him and worshiping Him and serving Him, it's Him serving us.

And thus do we better understand, I trust, the richness of these words, "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.'" Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the wonderful promise of heaven. We're so unworthy of it. And, Lord, as we come tonight to Your table, we want to cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. We want to purify our hearts. We want to confess our sins as we think about the cross. We want You to remember us and cleanse us again, wash the dirt off our feet so that when Jesus comes we'll be worthy servants to sit down at His table and have Him serve us forever.

Thank You for the hope of heaven. And thank you for the cross of Christ which is the reason for this hope. In our Savior's name, amen.

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