

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

Where Heaven Is and What It Is Like

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-13

Well, let's talk about heaven then and I hope you have your Bible handy and an eager heart as we come to the second in our series on messages on "Looking Toward Heaven."

Paul told the Romans that they should be rejoicing in hope. That's Romans 12:12. Rejoicing in hope...what he had in mind, of course, was the hope of heaven. And the hope of heaven should bring joy to our hearts. The preacher in Ecclesiastes, way back in the Old Testament, chapter 7 verse 1, was right when he said, "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth." But when he said it he meant it in a cynical way. He said the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth because life was so meaningless to him. But we can say it because we have the hope of heaven, the hope of rejoicing.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." And voiced the same joyous and wondrous hope. And what is it that makes death joyful? What is it that makes hope joyous? It is the prospect of heaven. We who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ are headed for an eternal dwelling place the Bible calls heaven.

Now last week we learned a few things about heaven. One is that it's the abode of God. Heaven is the abode of God. It is uniquely God's home. And though He is everywhere at all times, the very unique place of His residence, His abode, is heaven. Everything that is precious to us is in heaven. We saw that our Father is there, our Savior is now there, our fellow saints of Old Testament and New Testament times are there, our name is there, our inheritance is there, our reward is there, our treasure is there, our citizenship is there. Heaven is our home. And we saw that we're only aliens in this life.

The Bible tells us, also, that the holy angels are there. In Isaiah 6 you have a picture of God high and lifted up, exalted on His heavenly throne and surrounding Him are the holy angels. You find again in Matthew 22:30 and Luke chapter 15 verse 10 that the angels are in heaven. It states clearly that that is the place where the holy angels dwell.

So, heaven is the abode of God. Heaven is the abode of the holy angels. And heaven is the place where the saints dwell now who are already gone from this world and where all the rest of us will some day go. Even now though we're not in heaven we saw last week that we are living in the heavenlies. That is we have a foretaste of glory divine because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us

and we can already see the heavenly power of God working through us. We know something of the joy of heaven, something of the love of heaven, something of the power of heaven, something of the blessedness of heaven granted to us in Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit who gives us love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, selfcontrol, all of those things in full bloom come to reality in heaven. The Holy Spirit then is the pledge, or the down payment or the guarantee of the blessings to come. It's almost as if being a Christian is sort of indulging in the hors d'oeuvres before the main meal comes in heaven.

We already enjoy heavenly life. We are possessors of eternal life right now. We are members of a new family. We are possessors of a new humanity. We enjoy new affections. We are partakers of the divine nature. We are aliens here and really belong to a heavenly environment. Some day we're going to go there and live in that place.

Now as I said, many are already there waiting for us. Old Testament saints are there and those who have died since the death and resurrection of Christ are there as well. We'll learn later on that their spirits are now there waiting for the resurrection of their bodies. So they are there now in spirit, that is the real person is there, but not yet the glorified body which awaits the time of the Second Coming of Christ. But they're nonetheless there now. The Old Testament saints, the New Testament saints, that is on either side of the cross, those who in faith accepted the will and the way of God to salvation are there in the presence of God right now.

And I really believe, and this after years and years of Bible study, that the moment any saint of God died, they went immediately to heaven...whether Old Testament or New Testament. Some people, some Medieval theologians taught that when an Old Testament saint died he went into what was later called limbus patrum(?), the limbo of the fathers. He went into a sort of holding tank, a sort of a nowhere place where you waited until Christ died. And after Christ died and went to heaven, then you could get into heaven. But I don't think the Old Testament really verifies that. I think there is nothing to indicate in the Old Testament that there was a holding tank, or a waiting place. I think when an Old Testament saint died, he went into the presence of God. When a New Testament Christian dies, he goes into the presence of God.

For example, if we were to look at the Psalms, just as a couple of illustrations. In Psalm 16 it says in verse 11, "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life." Now here is the psalmist hopeful as he faces death. He says, "The Lord will not let his flesh see corruption. He will not abandon his soul to the grave or Sheol, but You will make known to me the path of life." Then this statement, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." The anticipation of the psalmist was that leaving this world he would go into the presence of God at His right hand to find pleasure forever more and fullness of joy.

Look at Psalm 23. In Psalm 23, that wonderful shepherd's Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake." Then this, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for Thou art with me." There is no place that you go when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death where God is not with you and heaven is where God is. "Thy rod, Thy staff, they comfort me, Thou doest prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows, surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life," and then what? "Then I will dwell in limbo." No, there's no limbo here. "Then I will dwell in the...what?...the house of the Lord." And where is the house of the Lord? Where does God dwell? He dwells in heaven.

The hope of the psalmist was to be absent from the body to be present with the Lord. Exactly what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. So I believe that when an Old Testament saint died, he went into the presence of God. If you look, for example, at Matthew 17 and the transfiguration of Christ, you will remember that on that mount where Christ was transfigured Moses and Elijah appeared. They appeared. Keep in mind that Christ had not yet died and had not yet risen from the dead and yet there were Moses and Elijah obviously...obviously safe in the presence of God and brought to that wonderful scene.

Take, for example, Luke 16 where you have Lazarus, the beggar, who died, it says, and when he died he was seen in Abraham's bosom. And both he and Abraham are seen in a place together, a place of blessedness, I believe a place in the presence of God.

Now if you understand what Abraham's bosom means, or Abraham's chest, it might help. The picture is...is a picture of an eastern banquet where they would recline. That was the way they did it. They had couches and a banquet was a very elongated prolonged event where you reclined and you ate and there was feasting and celebration and music and conversation and a banquet could go on for a long time. In fact, a wedding could go on for seven days of eating and eating and...and the guests would stay in the home. And so, reclining at the table was very common. The configuration of the reclining caused the head of one person to be against the chest of another one. For example, let's say that Abraham is reclining this way and Lazarus is reclining this way, Lazarus will be talking to Abraham from just about the level of his chest. That's the imagery. And if you were sitting across the table, it would appear to you as if almost Lazarus had his head upon the chest of Abraham.

Very much the same way that it was John the Apostle who was placing his head on the bosom of Christ at the Last Supper. Having that reclining position overlapping their heads, they would hold conversations that way. You certainly didn't want to hold a conversation with someone's feet and so you would position yourself where two heads were together and then two heads were together over here. And so, to be in Abraham's bosom meant to be reclining at a banqueting table in a celebration of joy. And the picture is the presence of God, the house of God, the table of celebration, that's the

idea.

And furthermore, the most honored man in the history of the Jews was what man? Abraham. And if you were reclining near the chest of Abraham, you were seated next to the guest of honor. And here is a beggar who spent all his life with absolutely nothing having personal intimacy with the greatest person who ever lived up to that time...with the exception of John the Baptist. But in Jewish history, the greatest. Here is this noaccount beggar reclining next to the guest of honor. The picture then is a picture of a banquet, a picture of a celebration, a picture if you will of the house of God and the feast that He lays out for those who have come into His presence. Lazarus may have had a diseased earthly life and he had to beg to exist, but here was the place of highest honor with the greatest father of Israel, namely Abraham. And so you have that place called "Abraham's bosom."

You also have another term used to speak of heaven in the Old Testament or in the time before the resurrection. Look with me for just a moment at Luke 23 and we'll go on from this particular point, but I want to establish it in your mind. Luke 23, now do you remember the thief on the cross? That...this is the account of that. And he says to Jesus in verse 42, "Remember me when You come in Your Kingdom." And He said to him...now keep this one in your mind, we're going to come back to this..."Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in...what?...paradise." Where's that? Somebody says, "Well, that's the same limbo." No, where is paradise? Well, you're going to be there today, you're going to be with Me there today, it's not a postresurrection place, then, cause Jesus doesn't come out of the grave for a couple of more days, this is paradise. Now what is paradise?

Well, to find out all you need to do is see if you can find paradise somewhere else in the Scripture. And we can in 2 Corinthians 12. This is long after the resurrection, long after the crucifixion. And Paul says, verse 2, "I know a man," he's speaking of himself, "in Christ who 14 years ago whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know." In other words, he had an experience that he really doesn't understand. God knows. "Such a man was caught up to the third heaven. He said, The Lord took me to heaven." He says, "I know how such a man whether in the body or apart from the body, I don't know, God knows, was caught up into...what?...paradise." So whatever paradise is it was before the resurrection and it's still after the resurrection. And the only conclusion you can make is that paradise is heaven. Abraham's bosom is heaven, paradise is heaven. Wherever a saint goes when he dies, it's the presence of God, it's heaven, it's the celebration time, it's the feast time, it's the Father's house and He lays out the banquet and you're there for all the joy that God can possibly provide His saints. Whether you're before or after the resurrection, I believe absence from the body is present with the Lord. I don't think the Old Testament saints went into a waiting place, a holding tank, I think they went into the presence of God. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," so says the psalmist.

So, heaven is the place where God lives and is holy known and experienced by His adoring angels. And heaven is the place where the saints who have died live in their spirits and their bodies will be

resurrected to join their spirits. We'll learn more about that later. And until we get there, we live in the heavenlies which means that we enjoy eternal life and all the blessing of the fruit of the Spirit here and now which is a foretaste of glory divine. And we await the day when we'll be like Christ when we see Him as He is, when we see the Christ who brought life and immortality to light in a new kind of resurrection humanity. We'll await to see that and we'll be like Him when that comes to pass.

So, heaven is a place where God dwells. Angels dwell. And the redeemed who have died dwell. That answers the question, what is heaven? Here's our second question. Where is heaven? Are you ready for that? Where is heaven?

Now I want you to know heaven is a place. It's a place like Los Angeles in that Los Angeles is a place, it's not a place like Los Angeles in terms of what Los Angeles is, it's a place like Los Angeles in terms of the fact that Los Angeles is somewhere, and so is heaven. It's a place like China, or South America, or the Alps. It is a place. But don't ask for a map because there are no maps. You can't chart its longitude and you can't chart its latitude and it can't be located in terms of geography and it can't be charted even in space...yet it is a place. It is a place where people who have glorified bodies, like Christ's resurrection body, will actually move around and live and function. Jesus, when He came out of the grave, could eat and walk and talk and He could drink as He did at the table with His disciples. And He could be touched and felt and recognized when He gave people the revelation that made Him recognizable in His glorified form. So heaven is a place for glorified people who are real...not an ethereal but real. It's a place.

You say, "Well, now where is it?" It is up...heaven is up. Paul says he was caught up into the third heaven, 2 Corinthians 12:2. Jesus reminded us that when He came to earth He descended and when He left to go back to heaven He ascended, Ephesians 4:8 to 10. It's up. He came down and went back up.

Now the angels told the early disciples in Acts 1:11 that this same Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you've seen Him go. When the Lord returns, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, He will come down from heaven and we will be caught up from earth into heaven, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says we'll be caught up. When God contemplates His creatures, Psalm 53:2 says He looks down. And when man contemplates God, according to Psalm 121:1, he looks up. When John was given a vision of heaven in Revelation 4, the word came to him, "Come up here and I'll show you heaven." The new Jerusalem which is the eternal dwelling place of the saints is seen coming down out of heaven. So clearly these and other Scriptures tell us it's up...it's up.

You say, "Well, that's a fairly general designation." You're right...very general, it's up. You say, "Well, up where?" Up in the third heaven. And beyond infinite space is the third heaven. It's beyond them all.

You say, "Well...well, how far is that?" I'm glad you asked. Pioneer 1 in Fall of 1958 went 70,000 miles into space and didn't get there. Pioneer 1 is not in heaven. Fortunately neither is the Soviet Lunik 1, it went in 1959, it orbited the Sun, sent back observations from 373,000 miles up and it's not in heaven either. U.S. Pioneer 4 went 407,000 miles up and we've been sending them out further and further and further and so far none of them are in heaven. Heaven does not have little metal things floating around in it. None of them are there.

You say, "Well, how far do you have to go to get there?" Well, let's think about it...a little science lesson. The Moon is 211,463 miles up. You could walk it...well, in theory you could walk it in 27 years if you did 24 miles a day...so it's not that far. But when you get to the Moon, when you get to the Moon you won't be in heaven. A ray of light reaches the Moon in 1.5 seconds because it's going 186,000 miles a second. Now let's just get moving at that speed and maybe we can get to heaven.

If we could go that fast we'd be at Mercury in 4.5 minutes, it's only 50 million miles. If we were going at the speed of light, 186,000 miles a second. We'd be in Mars in 4 minutes and 21 seconds, it's only 34 million miles. We'd be in Jupiter, that would take a little longer, 35 minutes and 11 seconds because it's 367 million miles.

Now if we're going at the speed of light, we'd hit Saturn in about an hour and 10 seconds, that's 790 million miles. Uranus, that's from the Greek word ouranos which means heaven, is 1.5 billion miles, that will take a little longer. Neptune is about three billion miles and Pluto, billions more. And we could just, as long as we're going we'll just keep going. And when we got past Pluto and we're way out there, we're still not in heaven. We haven't gotten there yet.

Now let me give it to you from another perspective. Our Earth is one of nine planets revolving around the Sun. Our Earth has a diameter of 8,000 miles. Its mass is estimated to be six septillion, six hundred sextillion tons. So we're in this massive heavy thing spinning around about 211, as I said, thousand miles to the Moon and about 93 million miles to the Sun. The Sun, by the way, is a diameter of 866,500 miles and a mass 330,000 times larger than the earth. The Sun...and the mind starts to stagger here, folks, at such enormous distances and masses...is only one star. The Sun is one star in a galaxy of some 100 billion other stars. All in the same galaxy. And we're still in just our little part of the universe.

Distances again become so great that they can't be measured in terms of miles, they have to be measured in light years which is 186,000 miles a second. Or if that doesn't register too well, 11 million 160 thousand miles a minute. The Sun is eight light minutes away.

You start expanding your mind through all these numbers and moving out into the galaxy and you just can't contain yourself. For example, our solar system has a diameter of 660 light minutes but the

galaxy of which it is a very small part has a diameter of 100,000 light years. And that's just our galaxy. And get this, there are billions of galaxies.

You say, "I'm beginning to feel like heaven is a long way away." That's right...that's right. Billions of galaxies.

Now get this...Jesus said to the thief on the cross, are you ready for this? "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." Now, folks, that is fast. You understand that? That is moving.

You say, "How can that be?" I don't know. Paul was caught up and didn't know what was going on. He says I don't know whether I was in my body, out of my body or anything. I just know I was caught up to the third heaven and back again the same day. How can that be? I don't know but it sure is fun to think about. The Bible says it's so fast that you will be changed in the...what?...twinkling of an eye. That doesn't mean a blink, that means the time it takes for light to flash off your pupil. That fast...we will be moving so fast it's inconceivable.

Heaven is up and heaven is far but heaven is near. You say, "How do we understand that?" We don't understand it. It's just kind of fun to think about. Heaven is big, too, you need to know that. It's big. You know how big it is? Are you ready for this? As big as God. You say, "How big is God?" Hahaha, He's infinite. You see, wherever our universe ends, the universe as we know it, the time and space universe, wherever it ends it is surrounded by infinite eternal heaven. So heaven isn't up there, heaven is...it is the infinity of the presence of God that surrounds the almost endless universe. It's incredible. It encircles our universe and is as big as our God.

Now listen, heaven is up. It's up beyond every thing that we know in the material universe. It is as big as God. It is that which engulfs within it the material universe as we know it which is billions and billions and billions of light years to its extensions. And it is that which is the heaven of God which embraces this universe in its midst. Now you can't keep thinking about that because what you've got beyond the universe that's created, the universe of time and space as we know it, is infinity. And it is as...an infinite as God is infinite and that's how infinite heaven is.

We can't handle that because we are captive to a time/space mentality. We cannot conceive of endless eternal heaven. But that's what the Bible teaches.

Now in the middle somewhere of this, or we don't now how it's all going to work. My own personal view is that in the new heaven and the new earth, at the end, the heaven that is beyond what we live in will engulf what we live in and transform it all into heaven and there won't be anything but heaven. Okay? The material universe as we know it will be wiped out. You remember reading in the Bible how the stars are going to fall, how the Moon will be turned to blood, how the heavens will roll up like a scroll, and what's going to happen is God in the end is going to make heaven everything. And

that's why it's called a new heaven and a new...what?...earth because there will be a rejuvenated earth that will be like the crystal jewel in the middle of this vast infinite heaven.

And God will recreate it all. And you say, "Well, why will the Earth be a focal point?" Because the Earth is the theater of redemption. The Earth was touched by the incarnate God and it was here that He spilled His blood and redeemed His eternal people. And so, in a sense, the focal point in many ways will be the Earth. And I believe a little corner of the new Jerusalem may touch the Earth. But the major city in heaven is called the new Jerusalem. All right? It's the main city of heaven. It is a massive self-contained planetlike thing, the new Jerusalem. In Revelation 21 it describes the new Jerusalem as coming down out of heaven. Now what that tells me is that if it's coming down out of heaven to find a place in the new heaven and the new earth, it must have been up there before. We don't know when God created it. We don't know when the new heaven and the new earth was built, it may well have been built long ago. It may be eternal, it's very likely that it's as eternal as God is. But we don't know that. But there is this wonderful city.

And by the way, there's no indication in Scripture that it's the only city, it's just the...it's just the special city. It's the main city. It's the capital city. And it is a measurable place. It's a measurable place.

Now that leads us to the third question. First question: what is heaven? Second question: where is heaven? Third question: what is heaven like? In just a brief time I want to introduce this to you. What is heaven like? And then we'll look at the new Jerusalem in detail, probably next time.

What is heaven like? All right, the first good view of heaven comes in the first chapter of an Old Testament prophecy written by a man named Ezekiel. Open your Bible to Ezekiel chapter 1. I never knew anybody in their right mind who did an exposition of Ezekiel 1. This chapter is...defies exposition. You can make a running leap and hope you hit something that's remotely related to truth, but it's a very, very complex chapter. Now I want you to see it. This is Ezekiel's vision of heaven. Are you ready for that? Somehow God in His wonderful wonderful revelation transported Ezekiel to a vision of heaven. Again, remember now, it's very far but it's very near. You couldn't get there in billions and billions and billions and billions of light years, but you could be there today if God took you. Incredible.

Now Ezekiel has a vision. I want you to see this, just kind of follow along, all right? Verse 4, "And as I looked, behold a storm wind was coming from the north. A great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it. And in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. And within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance. They had human form, each of them had four faces and four wings. And their legs were straight and their feet were like a calve's hoof and they gleamed like burnished bronze." Got the picture? I didn't think so.

Verse 8, "Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them. Their wings touched one another. Their faces did not turn when they moved and each went straight forward. As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man. All four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left and all four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces." You got it?

"Their wings were spread out above. Each had two touching another being and two covering their bodies. And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go without turning as they went. In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings." Like sparklers, see. "The fire was bright and lightning was flashing from the fire. And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning."

Now, folks, there is no way that you can understand what all that means. I have read commentaries and people will say, "Well, this is this...and this..." and it's just pure conjecture. What he is seeing is a flashing series of lightning bolts and spinning things and it's just an unbelievable scene that he's trying his best to describe.

Verse 15, "I looked at the living beings. Behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them. And the appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form. Their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another. Where whenever they moved they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved. As for their rims, the rims of the wheels, they were lofty and awesome and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. And whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also." Are you beginning to see it now? Hardly.

"Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. Whenever those went, these went." That's clear. "And whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse...aha...like the awesome gleam of crystal extending over their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other, each one also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other. I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went like the voice of the Almighty, sound of tumult, like the sound of an army camp. Whenever they stood still they dropped their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads, whenever they stood still they dropped their wings."

"Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance that's a certain kind of stone and on that which resembled a throne, high up was a figure with the appearance of a man. And then I noticed from the appearance of his loins 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, as the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the presence, or appearance, of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking..."

Nice try, Ezekiel. What is this? This is his description of the throne of God in heaven. You say, "What does it mean?" I don't know and neither did he. But he tried his best under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give us some understanding of the fantastic and confusing picture of blazing light splashing off polished jewels like colored wheels of light and rainbows, all mingled with angelic beings called the living beings and all around the throne of the eternal and glorious God a moving flashing sparkling spinning rainbow of brilliance. It's...it's...you can't go any further than that. Some would say the lion refers to majesty and power and the man intelligence and will, and the ox to patient service and the eagle to swift judgment, discernment and all of that and maybe there's some room for finding some reality of symbols. But what you're really looking at is the sovereignty of God, His majesty, His glory, the wonderful beauty of His heaven, the order, the symmetry, the perfection of it, all pictured in the wheels that moved perfectly in order, almost in concert with one another, the flashing thunderbolts, the sparkling jewels, the light, all picturing God's glory. That's...that's the picture of heaven. It's beyond our ability to understand it, it's inconceivable to us...the majesty, the wonder, the symmetry, the order of heaven.

Now we get a little closer to the details when we come to the last book in the New Testament. And for tonight, I'd like you to turn to Revelation and just at least begin to get a picture of at least one area of interest in heaven, and that's in chapter 4 of Revelation.

Now as we come into heaven in the book of Revelation, the first thing we meet comes to us in chapter 4. Verse 1, "And after these things, John says, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven. And by way of vision, this first voice which I heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, Come up here, I will show you what must take place after these things. Immediately I was in the spirit and behold...what did he see?...a what?...a throne was standing in heaven." Now I think he picks up where Ezekiel left off. Ezekiel ended chapter 1 with a throne, didn't he? A picture of the throne of God, beneath which all this other stuff was going on and the majesty and the wonder in the inexplicable glory of heaven.

Now John picks it up from Ezekiel and says, "Let me tell you about the throne." And he mentions the word throne over and over and over again in this section...throne, throne, throne, throne, twice in

verse 2 he mentions it. And then he follows up mentioning it again throughout this passage. He's concentrating here on one thing in heaven and that's the throne of God. That is the center of heaven. That's where God dwells. That's the focal point of God's presence.

Now look at the description. It's very much like Ezekiel's. Verse 3, "And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone." Now jasper as best we can reconstruct was a beautiful stone. A stone that perhaps could even have variant colors. It may be the closest thing to a diamond, sparkling off with a multiplicity of colors. And this is the...this is the vision of the flashing, sparkling semiopaque glory of the one sitting on the throne. And then it says, "A sardius in appearance," and by the way, a sardius was red...was red. The jasper and the sardius, also by the way, were the first and the last of the twelve stones on the breastplate of the high priest, according to Exodus 28. They represented Reuben who was the oldest, the first son, and they represented Benjamin who was the last son. And so, God even represents Himself, in a sense, as embracing Israel. Here you see God in majestic splendor in the sardius the red sardius perhaps speaks of God as what? Redeemer, having provided a blood sacrifice. So you see the glory of God, the sparkling of His majesty and glory, the grace and mercy of His redemptive character.

And it says there was a rainbow around the throne. And again the splashing of the same kind of things. Ezekiel mentions a rainbow also as we read. "And like an emerald in appearance," again just trying to describe the indescribable. As one pastor said one time, trying to unscrew the unscrutable. It's beyond comprehension.

And then he further describes it, skipping down to verse 5, he says, "From the throne," and this sounds so much like Ezekiel, "proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder." It sounds sort of like Mount Sinai when God gave a little bit of a taste of that, didn't He? When God came down to the mountain to give the law, what...what happened there? Thunder, lightning, flashing, exactly the same thing. In the presence of God there is the flashing and the thunder and the sparkling and the glory and the majesty and the multiplicity of colors and rainbows...incredible.

And then it says, "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God." It doesn't mean there are seven Holy Spirits, it means the sevenfold Spirit. And if you want to know how it is that the Spirit is a sevenfold Spirit, you read Isaiah chapter 11 and in Isaiah chapter 11 the character of the Holy Spirit is described. He is the Spirit of the Lord who is the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of strength, the Spirit of knowledge, the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

So, here is the throne and there is this majesty and glory and this judgment kind of context with lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and there also is the Spirit of God. Verse 6, this is something, "Before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal." Now get this picture. What you've got on the throne is God and all these colors, a rainbow, an emerald, sardius, jasper, all

these stones flashing colors all over and at the foot of the throne is this sea of crystal. And again, splashing off that crystal, all the color, the splendor, the majesty describing God...reflecting the glory of the throne of God. God is majesty and God is glorious and the Scripture uses color and crystal and light to reflect that.

In Exodus 24 it says, "Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel, they saw the Lord God of Israel. And under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky itself." Wow. When they had a vision of God then, they saw God on a throne with this clear pavement, this crystal pavement. This is heaven, folks, this is heaven. It's a real place, God is really there, God appears as flashing lights, God is a Spirit, right? You cannot see the form of God. We'll talk later about what we will see and who we will see in heaven. But we have a place. And in that place is a throne. And on that throne is light flashing and sparkling and beneath that throne is a crystal clear brilliant sparkling sea of glass. At one point it's described as sapphire because the color is coming off of it. Another point, it's described as clear because it is clear and it picks up the color that sparkles from the presence of the one on the throne Himself. It's incredible. Ezekiel describes that floor on which the throne of God rests back in verse 22, I read a moment ago, as the color of awesome dazzling crystal...I love this phrase...stretched across the sky. That's unbelievable...inconceivable things to us.

Now listen to me, will you listen? Get this much? Heaven is not a land of shadows and mists. People say, "I...I died and went to heaven and I came back." Well, how was it? "Well, there was a little light at the end of a long tunnel." You hear people say that? I've read all those books...all that stuff. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and all that stuff and they die and they see a little light at the end of the tunnel. The people who supposedly died and were revived and came back again...and then the guy..the guy that irritates the life out of me who says he went to heaven and came back and there are no bedrooms and no bathrooms. Listen, that is ludicrous. Heaven is not a land of bedrooms and bathrooms...we know that. Heaven is not some light at the end of some dark tunnel. Heaven is not one little sparkler in the middle of the dark...of the darkness. It is splendorous. It is magnificent beyond description...not a land of shadows and mists and fog.

And verse 4 says, "Around the throne were 24 thrones and on the thrones were 24 elders sitting clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their head." I personally believe they are representatives of the church, the new humanity, the new priesthood, the church in heaven. There we are, folks. You say, "Where are we?" Well, the Lord's got His throne and there are 24 others and those are emblematic of the church. I believe we're all reigning with Him right there. We're going to be in the splendor. We're going to be in there flashing and sparkling and bouncing that glory right off that crystal sea along with God.

And since Ezekiel says that it stretches across the sky, frankly, folks, maybe all of heaven looks like this...all of it. And remember, how big is it? It is big enough to engulf the universe which is billions of

light years to its extremity. This is incredible. Does it make you kind of want to get out there and see it and be a part of it?

In verse 6 tells us that around the throne were four living creatures. Probably have reference to angels, cherubims, so there it is. Here is the angelic host, here's the redeemed church, those who know God and represent His new humanity. And then there is God Himself in all the wonder and splendor of His majestic revelation. What a scene...what a scene. So there's a throne in heaven. There's a throne in heaven.

I can't resist telling you there's one other thing there, too. There's one other thing there. There's a temple there. There's a temple. Chapter 3 verse 12, you know what was customary in the ancient cities? In an ancient city, in the middle of the city there were two major buildings. One was a palace for the king and the other was a temple for the deity. We talked about that last week. In the middle of a city, the palace would be against the temple. The king is in one place and God was in the other. So you had the divine rule and the human rule. And in heaven, in a sense, there is the throne of God...God as the majestic sovereign and then there is the temple which represents God as the one who is worshiped. He is the theme of both.

But chapter 3 verse 12 says, "To the one who overcomesthat refers to a believer, a ChristianI'll make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he will not go out from it anymore." There is a temple there. And we will be a pillar in that temple, He says, those who overcome.

In verse 15 of chapter 7, "For this reason, it says, the people who have washed their robes and come out of the Tribulationthose saints who have come out of the Great Tribulation, he saysare before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them." He's going to cover them. There's a temple there. And it's...it's where God is. And we're going to be in that temple and we're going to serve Him in that temple.

In chapter 11 of Revelation, verse 19 it says, "The temple of God which is in heaven was opened and the ark of the covenant appeared in His temple and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

In chapter 15, again it refers to that temple in verse 5, "After these things I looked and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened." Now listen, folks, there's a temple there. There's a temple there. That's clear. But would you follow me to chapter 21 for a moment and discover quite an interesting thought? And I'll draw this to a conclusion with this.

In chapter 21 verse 22, catch this, "And I saw...what?...no temple in it for the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb...what?...are its temple." Now we know what the temple is, right? You can't separate the temple from God. The temple isn't a place where God dwells, the temple is God. The temple is

God. In the holy city there's no temple but God. God is the temple, that's the definition we wanted. The throne, the temple...the throne is God, the temple is God. Now I don't know how to distinguish that. There is a temple and there isn't a temple. There is a throne and there isn't a throne. God is the throne and God is the temple. But that's part of the mystery of heaven. I saw no temple in it for the Lord God and the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

Some feel, and it could be true, that this describes the new heaven and the new earth which is yet to be fully built. And that presently there is a temple but when the new heaven and new earth are constructed by God there won't be a temple. I'd rather say that the temple is defined here...there's no temple in it, that is no built temple for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And so that simply defines the temple that was referred to earlier. And when it says we will be made a pillar in the temple of our God, it means we'll have a place in the very presence of God. When it says we'll serve in His temple it means we'll serve in His presence. Tremendous thought. I mean, we're going to be there with all of that. That's what heaven is like. That's what heaven is like.

Let's bow together.

Father, we're overwhelmed tonight. What a vision You've given us of heaven. It's so far away and yet so near. How do You take us across the millions and billions of light years to the eternal place that engulfs the time and space universe? We can't even imagine what it would be like. No wonder Ezekiel had trouble, no wonder John and Paul couldn't explain it. O Father, we long for the day when we can be there, the incredible world to come and see Your blazing flashing majesty and reign on the thrones alongside of You and serve in Your presence. We long for that day when we meet and fellowship with the saints of ages past and gather with all the redeemed. We desire so much to spend eternity visiting the new Jerusalem, the capital city of the new heaven and the new earth. And, Father, it all comes down to this, the only people who come into Your heaven are those who have received Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so I pray right now that if there's anyone in the fellowship of this service tonight who has not given their life to Christ and has not the hope of heaven, that they would do that even in this moment, that they would confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, receive the forgiveness that He brings through His death and resurrection and that they would be made citizens of heaven.

For those of us who are on our way, may we be constantly looking toward heaven, loving the appearing of Christ, longing for the day when we can enjoy what You've prepared for us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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