

The New Jerusalem

Selected Scriptures

90-14

Well, as you know, we are looking at the subject of heaven. In fact we've titled the series, "Looking Toward Heaven," and this is message number three. And I've kind of pointed out to you as we've gone along in our look at heaven, that in the day in which we live there seems to be in the church a very small amount of concern for the subject of heaven. In fact, the church in my generation was really left a legacy of biblical preaching with an emphasis on the glory of heaven. I was left that legacy. But the church today is leaving the next generation a legacy of not expository preaching but relational preaching, and not an emphasis on heaven but an emphasis on personal success here and now. So, a major transition has taken place and I think it's time for us to get back and take a good look at heaven.

We grew up in a time when men proclaimed God's Word and preached against sin. We're living in a time when men specialize in fund raising and public relations. It's a different day for the church and I think we've lost our sense of perspective, with regard to heaven, and we need to get it back. In fact, to miss the significance of heaven is greatly, greatly defective in the life of the church. It leads to all kinds of problems. John Bunyan who, as you well know wrote the classic analogy of the Christian life called "Pilgrim's Progress," at one point in the "Pilgrim's Progress" focused on the dialogue between two pilgrims who are on their way to the celestial city. In fact the whole point of the book is the pilgrim on the way to the celestial city which is heaven. And as these two pilgrims go along on the way to that celestial city one asks the other, "When do you find yourself in your most wholesome and most vigorous spiritual state?" The answer of the other is, "When I think of the place to which I am going." By that simple little point in dialogue along the way John Bunyan emphasizes the fact that vigorous spiritual life is achieved by those who contemplate the place to which they're going, who are in some sense divorced from the place where they have been and even from the place where they are, and are literally preoccupied with the place to which they are headed. Bunyan, I think, understood the power of a heavenly anticipation, power to overcome all of the trials and tests of the journey of life. The church today, I really believe, would be transformed by heavenly mindedness.

I remember when I was small, a common statement was, "He is so heavenly minded he's no earthly good." Did you ever hear that? Well, I don't think that's true anymore. I think we'd have to reverse that and say he's so earthly minded he's no heavenly good because there's been a tremendous shift in thinking. And in this series I'm trying to draw our thoughts to heaven to teach us to think of the place to which we are going because ours, too, is a journey to a celestial city and we have to be heavenly minded to be any earthly good.

Now, in our study we've tried to answer some questions since it is a topical study rather than a given text of Scripture. The first question we asked and answered was the question: what is heaven? We have already learned that heaven is a place. It is a place where God dwells in sovereign majesty, and is wholly and fully known, and experienced by His adorning angels and saints who are forever in

His presence. Old Testament and New Testament saints are there in spirit, and they're with God waiting for their glorified bodies which they will receive at the Second Coming. So, heaven is a place. It is a place where God dwells and where all of the saints of all the ages will dwell forever in glorified bodies. The ones who are there now are there without their bodies awaiting the resurrection when the body and the soul are joined together for that eternal state. And we'll look more at that in the future. Now, until we get to heaven, the Bible tells us that even now as Christians we live in a state called the heavenlies. So, in a sense, heaven is a place and it is also a state of being. We are not in the place called heaven, but we are in the sphere or the state of being that is called the heavenlies. That is, we live in the sphere where God rules. We're not yet in the heaven of heavens, but we are under the rule of God in the sphere of His spiritual dominion over the hearts and lives of those who believe in Him through Jesus Christ. That's why Ephesians 1 says we've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.

We already are tasting heavenly life. We have a taste of it by the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have a taste of it because we possess eternal life here and now. We have a taste of it because we are members of God's eternal family. We have a taste of it because we are already made partakers of a newly created humanity. Our souls have been recreated. We're waiting the recreation of our bodies. We taste heaven now because we experience the attitudes of heaven: love, joy, peace, goodness, and so forth. We are, in fact, partakers already of the divine nature. Philippians 3:20 and 21 says we're citizens of heaven. So, we're not in the place called heaven, but we are in the sphere called the heavenlies, and we are having a foretaste of glory divine. That means in this world, insofar as we live here, we are aliens and strangers. We belong to another country. Our Father is there, our Savior is there, our fellow saints are there, our treasure is there, our inheritance is there, our home is there. We're just passing through this place. So, the first question we answered then: heaven is a place and heaven is a sphere where God rules. Secondly, we asked the question: where is heaven? And the answer was what? Up. Up. Up where? Well, it's up in the third heaven. Heaven is far. We took a trip past all the planets and all the stars and we still weren't there. It's very far and yet you can get there how fast? In one day, at least, maybe in the twinkling of an eye. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "This day you'll be with Me in paradise." It's far, yet near.

The third question we asked, and the one we want to look back to tonight is: what is heaven like? What is it like? We looked at Ezekiel chapter 1 and Ezekiel attempted to give us a description of it and basically boggled our minds. Ezekiel chapter 1 is a complex and admittedly confusing picture of a blazing light display splashing off polished jewels like colored wheels of light, all mingled with the majesty and movement of holy angels, some kind of a blinding rainbow of glorious brilliance that's almost, and certainly even indescribable. It's the place where God has His throne and where there is flashing brilliant displays of splendorous light emanating from that throne.

We also said that Revelation tells us there's not only a throne there but there's a temple there. But we noted some interesting things. According to Revelation 3:12 it says there's a temple in heaven that the saints never leave. It has to be a large temple. It is immense, it is infinite, and it is eternal. We can never be out of it, according to 3:12 and 7:15. In fact, it says in God's temple He spreads His tabernacle over them. And we learn later if we get into chapter 21:22, that the Lord Himself and the Lamb are the temple. What kind of temple is it that you can never leave? What kind of temple is it that God in eternal heaven spreads over all His people? It is His presence. There is a throne, a focal point where God then reveals His majestic sovereign glory, but at the same time there is a temple that is as infinite as the whole of heaven itself. Incredible. Incredible.

So, there's a throne there, and yet though there be a focal point of a throne, all of infinite heaven is the presence of God. And all of the presence of God and the Lamb, therefore, constitutes the temple. So, we'll never be out of the temple because it's as infinite as God's presence is. It has to be a temple that can contain the eternal God, and the only kind of temple that can contain the eternal God is the temple that's as infinite as God is.

Now, for a little more detailed description of heaven, let's go to Revelation 21 and 22. These chapters tell us about what the Bible calls the new heaven and the new earth, the eternal state. Now, let me give you a little bit of a perspective. We hit on this two weeks ago but I want to remind you of it. We said that we have a present universe. That present universe exists as we know it, going out all the stellar bodies, stars, moons, planets and so forth. That is the present heaven. Down here is the present earth. Surrounding the sphere of our expanding universe is the infinite abode of infinite God, as limitless as God is Himself. Someday, God is going to literally engulf the whole universe and turn it into the final heaven. That's why it's called the new heaven and the new earth. Right now, we have an old earth and an old heaven. They have been touched by sin. They have been marred by the Fall. In fact, the earth is the dominion of Satan, under the dominion of Satan. The earth is populated by fallen men. Outer space is populated by fallen demons. And only the third heaven is pristine pure flawless.

But in the recreation there will be a new heaven and a new earth; that is to say the third heaven will literally engulf the first and second heaven and the earth into the final eternal state, and from earth on out to infinity will all be the heaven of heavens. There will just be one little pocket somewhere called hell. But apart from that, everything will engulf itself in the final state called the new heavens and the new earth.

Now, that is not a new thought. In fact, that is a thought that the prophets of the Old Testament were given by God. In Isaiah 65:17 it says, "For behold I create new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind but be glad and rejoice forever in what I create." Now, that tells us that when we get into the new heavens and the new earth, we will never remember what the old was like, never, in that glorious new heaven. Chapter 66 gives us a similar perspective in Isaiah. Verse 22. "Just as the new heavens and the earth which I make will endure before Me, declares the Lord, so your offspring," and so forth and so on. And so, there are a couple of references in the Old Testament to the new heaven and the new earth. You find it again in Psalm 102 verses 25 and 26. So, this is something that God had promised long ago. We find also in Hebrews chapter 1, a quote from Psalm 102, verse 10, "Though, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the works of Thy hands, they will perish but Thou remainest and they all will become old as a garment and as a mantle Thou will roll them up, as a garment they will also be changed, but Thou art the same and Thy years will not come to an end." In other words, the psalmist is saying and the writer of Hebrews is quoting, "God, there is a heaven and an earth but You're going to change them." And that's right. There will be an eternal earth. There will be an eternal universe. There will be an eternal heaven. They'll all be one and the same. There'll be an earth not like the earth we know and there will be outer space not like the outer space that we know.

Now, we come to Revelation and we have a description of it. The history of the earth is over. The final great holocaust on the earth has been fought. The Battle of Armageddon is finished. Satan is taken captive and sent to hell. The 1,000 reign of Jesus Christ is over. All of the ungodly of all of the ages are dispensed into hell. Verse 14, "Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire," this is the

second death, the lake of fire. If anyone's name is not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. And with the dispensing of Satan and all the ungodly into this place called hell, nothing is left but to then create the new heaven and the new earth. The judgment on sin is final, and we know come to the eternal state. The millennial earthly reign of Christ is over; the great white throne has accomplished its purpose as God has sentenced the unrighteous and Satan to eternal hell. The whole universe then, except hell wherever it is, is then dissolved into the new heavens and the new earth. God, as we saw in Isaiah, will create a new heaven and a new earth that's so splendidous that nobody will ever remember the old one. All remembrance of the first one will vanish.

Peter characterizes it in 2 Peter 3:13, "Nevertheless, he says, we according to His promise," and that's the promise in Psalm 102 and Isaiah 65 and 66 that he has in mind, "we look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein," here's the key, "dwells righteousness, untouched by sin, untouched by evil." Now, we realize that since the fall of Satan, the first heaven and the second and the earth, of course, have been under the curse. Cursed is the ground, it says in Genesis. In Job chapter 15, I believe it's verse 15, the Bible says the heavens are not clean in Thy sight. Even the heavens as we know them have been polluted by sin. In Isaiah 24:5 the Scripture says the earth is polluted under the inhabitants thereof. We live in a polluted universe. And God's going to redo it.

Now, God gave us an illustration of this. Before we look at the new heaven and the new earth mentioned in 21, he says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away," before we dig into that, let me show you a picture of another devastation on the earth that serves as a small illustration of what God is going to do. Second Peter chapter 3, turn to it in your Bibles, 2 Peter chapter 3. It's a familiar account to you.

In 2 Peter chapter 3, perhaps we could look to verse 4 as a starting point. The scoffers and mockers come and say, "Where is the promise of His coming? Why should we believe that Jesus is coming, for ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." Their logic is: we've never had a holocaust, why would we have one now? There never has been a judgment on the earth, why would there be one now? Why should we believe that God's going to do something? He's never done anything yet. That's like saying I'll never die, I never have. Verse 5, "For when they maintained this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water." Did they forget that there was a time when God broke up the heavens, and broke up the earth, and drowned the whole of the human race?

Prior to the Genesis flood, recorded in the sixth chapter of Genesis, there was a vapor that covered the earth, the heavens was a certain form. There was a vapor. There was no rain. The vapor filtered out the ultra-violet rays that penetrate now to the earth. People lived a long time. Animals lived a long time. As you know, they lived into the nine hundreds of years because there were none of those ultra-violet rays penetrating through that filter of the water canopy that surrounded the earth. The earth then flourished with vegetation unlike anything we would ever comprehend today. But God, because of sin, broke up the old heavens and broke up the old earth. The water came out of the sky, burst out of the deeps and drowned all of the human race. And so, what the writer Peter is saying is that is a picture, a small picture, of how God can bring judgment through the renovation of the heavens and the earth. And then that's to remind us who might be silly enough to think that God never has done anything so He never will, not to think like that.

There's another illustration of what God can do in Luke 17 when you see the reminder there of the fire and brimstone that came down on Sodom and Gomorrah. But God says that there will be a day when He will renovate the whole thing again, only this time far greater than anything experienced in the Noahic flood. The whole thing is going to be destroyed. Look at verse 6. He says the world at one time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth, by His word, are being reserved for fire. Once God destroyed the earth by water, the next time by fire during the Day of Judgment, and destruction of ungodly men. Verse 10, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief," that is, with stealth, unsuspected. "In which the heavens will pass away with a roar." The heavens as we know them will pass away. The elements will be destroyed with intense heat. And the earth and its works will be burned up. The whole thing recreated, the whole thing.

Of course, the discovery of the atom has given us the understanding that this can in fact happen. We have created nuclear bombs, split the atom, and unleashed the potential for unbelievable destruction. In fact, a chain reaction of atomic explosions could literally disintegrate this earth, and the reaction touching heavens' vapors of H₂O could then split them and the whole of the heavens would join in the conflagration. The structure of our earth, I'm sure you know this, has tremendous fire potential. We sit on the crust of a fireball. The 25,000 miles of circumference around the earth, the 8,000 mile diameter is mostly molten flame. The atom has the capability to destroy the outside and the universe, the fire on the inside if unleashed could certainly destroy the earth and join in the conflagration. Just as God one time broke up the heavens and dumped the water, and then brought water up from the earth, He can bring fire down and fire up as well.

Inside the earth is a flaming boiling liquid lake of fire. And when it gets too near the earth's crust, and the crust of the earth is too thin, it bursts through the surface, by pressure blows a piece of the crust off. We call that a what? A volcano. The earth then is a giant firebomb, whichever way you look at it. And God will unleash that fire power from inside and outside through atomic energy and destroy the whole of the universe. And He will make a new heaven and a new earth.

Now, with that in mind, let's go back to Revelation chapter 21. I'm kind of excited to see that new heaven and new earth. The word "new" is important: a new heaven and a new earth. It's new in the sense of *kainos*, which is an interesting Greek word. It means as to quality, not as to time. Not new in the sense that it's just new as opposed to old, but new in the sense that it's different as opposed to the other one. It's the same term used, for example, in 2 Corinthians 5, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." Not just that you're new as opposed to old, but that you're new as opposed to different. The quality is changed. So, the new heavens and the new earth will be like our newness, like our newness, better. Better, glorified, sinless, eternal. The new heaven that he mentions there in verse 1 will be released from former beauty to new beauty.

You say, "Well, what does that mean?" I don't know what it means, specifically. "Well, how will the stars look?" I don't know. I don't know what it will even be like. But I'll tell you one thing: there will be no more tempests, and no more storms, and no more fierce winds, and no more thunderbolts, and no more home for demons. Now, beyond that I don't know what it will be like. And if God told me, I wouldn't understand it anyway so why waste the paper?

And also he says a new earth. What will that be like? I don't know that either. It will be a place where you can walk, though, because we'll be in glorified bodies, and when Jesus was in His glorified body, He walked. It will be a place where you can eat, because when Jesus came out of the grave, He ate. He didn't need to eat to sustain His life, but He ate because there was a certain joy in eating. Now,

you look at the earth today and you still see beautiful spots on our earth, carpeted with green and flowers, waving with full crops, shady trees, snow-capped mountains, peaks, brooks, crystal streams. But in spite of the spots of beauty, it's a sick earth filled with ailments, and disorders, and disease, and death, and pollution, and ripped up by the miseries of godlessness.

And frankly, we can only imagine what the new heaven and the new earth would be like. Someday when the heavens are destroyed by burning, as Peter says in 2 Peter 3:12, and when the elements melt with intense heat, he says we will look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. And that's really all we can know. No longer smarting under the curse of sin. No longer being torn by steel to yield up its wealth. No longer infested with thorns and briars. No weeds in your garden. That's practical. Eternal soil never cut with graves, sod never moistened with blood, never stained with tears. An earth whose forever hills flow with salvation, rivers, and whose eternal valleys know only the sweet paradise of God. We'll be in that earth. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit," what? "The earth," Matthew 5:5. And that wonderful prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" will never need to be prayed again because God's will will reign on earth.

I was listening to a tape by Al Martin. We had him preach in our church some time ago and enjoyed him so much. He was waxing eloquent thinking of heaven. This is what he said, "Think of it, this very globe, and I love to think of it in these terms, this very earth that has soaked up the blood of multitudes upon battlefields, this very earth where the sod is stained with innocent blood, this very earth that supports the footsteps of the tyrant, and the lecher, and the murderer, and the thief, this very earth that supports the rebel activity of the multitudes of the unconverted, this very earth in which God Almighty is denied, this very air that surrounds us that men breathe into their larynx and speak words of blasphemy and denial of God, that this very world and its total life-support system will be renovated by the fire of judgment at the return of Christ. And when He's through, every particle, every atom of this earth and its support system will be permeated with nothing but righteousness. It will be the new heaven and the new earth wherein righteousness and righteousness alone has its home." Beautifully said. What blessed prospects.

Well, if we're going to get through these two chapters, we better go a little faster. Go back to verse 1. Don't believe it, folks. The first heaven and the first earth have passed away, he says. They're gone. And there is no longer any sea, or no more sea. It's interesting to try to imagine what the writer had in mind about that. And I'm not sure that we can be dogmatic, but there are a couple of ways to approach that thought. "No more sea." I don't know if you know this but the Jews were not, are not really sailors. There was a generation of people living in that land before them that we know as the Phoenicians who were by trade sailors, the great sailors of the world. The Jews were not. They were an agricultural people. And to be honest with you, they had a healthy fear of the sea. That's why when Jesus wanted to speak to them of a horrifying death in Matthew 18, He referred to a man having a millstone hanged around his neck and being drowned in the depth of the sea.

To the Jew, the sea spoke of turbulence, agitation, violence, mystery, restlessness. It even spoke of separation. Some think the idea of no more sea has reference to national boundaries. Whether it means nothing to fear, nothing to be afraid of, or whether it means nothing to separate you from other nations, and perhaps it means both. There'll be no more sea. Nothing to cause you fear. Nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to separate you from other people.

And then John looks, and verse 2, and I want to focus on this for a few moments, and says, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem." You have a new heaven and a new earth and you certainly need a

New Jerusalem. "And I saw it coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." That's interesting. That gives me the idea that the New Jerusalem was already created, already done, already in place and when the new heaven and the new earth are created, then the New Jerusalem comes down out of the third heaven where it's already been made into the final state of the new heaven and the new earth. He says I saw it not being created but coming down out of heaven from God. Now, the heaven where God is, is the third heaven, so we can surmise that God has prepared up there this New Jerusalem. And at the right time, it's going to come right down into the new heavens and the new earth and become the capital city of the final state.

But, it will already be prepared by then. And it's my personal feeling that it may well be that which Jesus went to prepare when He said, "I'm going to go away and I'm going to prepare," what? "A place for you." And it may well be that before He comes again, He's making the New Jerusalem.

Now, there have been three Jerusalems: the historical Jerusalem, there is a millennial Jerusalem, and then the eternal Jerusalem which I think is the capital city of eternity. It's the capital city of heaven. It's not heaven; it's the capital city of heaven. It is the city whose builder and maker is God. It is the city for which Abraham really longed and looked. Hebrews 12:22, you've come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, occupied by myriads of angels and the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and God and the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and Jesus. It's the place where all the saints are. And I believe that it's that special city that comes down. It's adorned, it says, as a bride ready for her husband. What does that mean? Just beauty, splendor, glory. I mean, what greater way to express beauty than adorned as a bride, emphasizing certainly its bride character. It's the place where the church dwells, the church who is the bride of Christ. It's the bride city. It may well be the place where the marriage feast took place in Revelation 19:9 when the saints go to be with the Lord, they go to the marriage supper of the Lamb. It may take place at a special banquet place in the New Jerusalem. But it's the city identified from the standpoint of the people who are in it and they are the bride of Christ, His bride, the church. Verse 9 says, "Come here, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God."

So, it's the bride city. It's the city where the church dwells. People cannot be disassociated from the place. This is the bride city because this is where the church is. The Lamb's wife is there. And frankly, cities are designated in ancient times often by the character of the people who are in them. In fact the city of Corinth, on a negative note, was so identified with the immorality of the people that the verb "to Corinthianize" meant to go to bed with a prostitute, because the city was identified with the kind of people who were there.

Now, the question then comes: is this only the occupancy place of the church? No. Although it is uniquely the bride city and the church gives it that unique character, I believe that all of the saints of all the ages are going to be there. They're all going to be there. Old Testament saints, saints who have been redeemed and come out of the Great Tribulation, I believe they'll all be in that place. The wonderful truth is that it's the city of all the redeemed of all the ages.

Why then single out the church? Because this book is written to the church. It's written to comfort the persecuted church. It's the bride city from the perspective of the reader because it's his city. It's uniquely his city, her city, who loves Christ to give them comfort, to give them hope. So, John looks and as he looks he sees a new heaven and a new earth. The new heaven, the new earth have been

completely recreated. And then he sees coming out of the third heaven into that new heaven and new earth this bride city, so characterized in splendor because of the church that is in it, which will be meeting with its bridegroom, Christ, forever and forever and forever.

Notice that it's coming down out of heaven. And I only point up to you again: this means it probably already existed and is now simply incorporated into the final state. I read one writer who said that because it's a cube, it probably has one corner that touches on the earth and the rest just stretches into space, but we don't know that. We don't know exactly where it will sit in the midst of the final state. But, I believe it was already in existence and I think maybe Jesus is right now getting it ready for the time when it comes down.

Now, why a city? Is it a city like we know a city? Well, probably not. It will be different, surely. Not like we know a city. In the first place there won't be the politics of a city. There won't be the corruption of a city. It will just be a different kind of city. You say, "Well, then why call it a city?" Because you have to understand how they viewed a city in that time. In fact, I've thought about the fact that when I think of heaven I think of the country, not the city. But those people thought of the city because they were nomads who had no city. And the people who wandered in the wilderness saw in a city safety, peace, joy, fellowship, culture. That's why Abraham looked for a city. The Jewish people who were wandering and wandering and wandering wanted a city of their own. That's why Jerusalem was such a prize to them. And the person who is wandering in a weary place looks for a city where there's warmth, and fellowship, and friendship, and food, and safety, and protection, socialization, communion. And that's the thought. That's the thought. It's the place where all the saints of all the ages are. It's the place where the just men have been made perfect. It's the place where all the holy angels are. It's the place where God is, the place where Christ is, it's where we all want to be because we all want to be with all the people we love. What a thought. All the redeemed gathered in a bustling city.

What does a city mean? Harmony, mutuality, responsibility, sharing of duties. We'll all have tasks and duties in that place. We'll socialize at all different levels and points and means and ways. And yet perfect oneness, nothing to mar or interrupt pure fellowship. Can you imagine pure fellowship? Can you imagine a society of people where no one ever gets mad? Where no one ever does anything wrong? Or no one ever says anything wrong? Where no one ever thinks anything wrong? Can you imagine a society where everyone gets along absolutely perfect? Can you imagine a society where everyone loves everyone like God loves everyone? Where everything is absolutely perfect? Where you get along with everybody perfectly forever and ever? Where you have perfect love for perfect people always?

Now, how exciting that is if you really love the brotherhood. I mean, I love Christian people and they love me, and we're not perfect. But I would rather be in the fellowship of believers than anywhere else, wouldn't you? I love the fellowship of believers. And I would love the fellowship of perfect believers, even more than I love the fellowship of imperfect ones. So, if you think about what's involved in that, that's a fabulous thought. The epitome of fellowship. Marvelous thought. How exciting if you love the brethren.

And what makes it really special is verse 3, God is there, uninterrupted and eternal fellowship with Him. Just think about heaven. Think about how hard it is to get along with people here. We love socialization. We love fellowship. We love communion, but it's so rocky and it's so difficult and people disappoint you, and discourage you, and irritate the life out of you. But someday, we're going

to be perfect people with perfect love in a perfect place forever and ever and ever. And if you love the brethren, you've got to get excited about that.

Drop down to verse 9, "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the last seven last plagues came and spoke with me." It's the same angel that had appeared earlier in the Tribulation time. Said, "Come here, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God." So, this angel sits John in his vision on some mountain on the new earth from which he can look up and see this holy city, God's masterpiece, the capital city of the infinite heaven. And the details, dear friends, are absolutely mindboggling. And what's really exciting is we're going there, folks. We're going there. Talk about a tour brochure, boy, could you put one together on this place.

Verse 11, "Having the glory of God," now would you underline that? That is the essence of the eternal heaven. It is the place where God's glory is manifest. God's glory is manifest. In Isaiah 60 verse 19 it says, "The sun shall be no more the light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God thy glory," Isaiah 60 verse 19. What a statement. Verse 23 of Revelation 21, "The glory of God illumines it." You don't need stars and sun and moon anymore. You don't need them because God will light the whole, get this, of the infinite heaven, particularly this sparkling celestial jewel called the New Jerusalem. And then John tries to describe it. Verse 11, "Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper."

When I was a kid I used to go, this is the closest I can get, folks. I used to go roller skating in Pasadena. And they had this crystal thing hanging in the middle. Have you ever been to one of those? You've probably been in a dance hall where they had them. I was at a skating rink. This crystal thing with all those little pieces of glass, and they shoot lights at it and the stuff is flashing all over everywhere. That, in some small mundane mean way, may express the essence of what John is trying to communicate. He sees coming down out of heaven into this eternal state this sparkling crystal diamond flashing thing out of which is splattering the very glory of the blazing essence of the nature of God. Breathtaking. And the infinite splashing light of the glory of God literally covers the infinite universe. Sparkling breathtaking beauty.

And then he goes from its glory to its design. And this is interesting. And remember now, he's trying to describe the indescribable. "It had a great and high wall with 12 gates, and at the gates, 12 angels. And the names were written on them which are those of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east, and three gates on the north, and three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had 12 foundation stones and on them were the 12 names of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gate, and its wall, and the city is laid out as a square." Perfect symmetry, the mind of God, perfect symmetry. "Its length is as great as the width. He measured the city with a rod. 1,500 miles. Its length and width and height are all equal. He measured its walls, 72 yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements." That's interesting to note, isn't it? The angels use the same measurements we do.

Now, you say, "Now, wait a minute. Stop and take me through this a little bit." Okay, it's a literal city. It's a symmetrical city. Go back to verse 12. It had a great and high wall. You say why? I don't know why. But it did. If God wanted to put a great and high wall, He can put a great and high wall. But it's a

symbol of security. A symbol of protection. Like all ancient cities, safety was of importance to the people. They wanted a place where there was security. That symbolizes security. It says in chapter 22 verse 14, the only people who can come in are the ones who wash their robes. They can enter by the gates. And outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the immoral persons, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. The gates then symbolize the fact that somebody's in and somebody's out. Somebody's in and somebody's out. The wall, it says in verse 17, is 72 yards according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. It's a pretty amazing wall when you think about it. But even the puniest wall would do, it's just that God designed to build it like that in the vision that John saw. It's a symbol of inclusion, and a symbol of safety, and a symbol of protection, and also a symbol of exclusion in that all that is unworthy is left outside.

There are 12 gates, and each one has a guard, the honor guard or angels. Each of the gates has the name of a tribe of Israel showing God's eternal covenant relationship with Israel, as well as the bride. And so, though it's called the bride city, it's very clear that it's identified with Israel and we then conclude that it's a place where all the saints of all the ages may abide. 12 is apparently the number of perfect symmetry and the number of completeness. 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, 12 Apostles, 12 pearls, 12 kinds of fruit, 12,000 furlongs, and 12 by 12 cubits. God's into 12 when it comes to the eternal state.

Verse 13, "There are three gates each side." And what does that mean? Gates imply that you what? You come and go. Please don't think this is where we're all forever contained, folks. It's not. We have the infinite universe to travel through. And since we can get from here to the third heaven in the twinkling of an eye, it won't be any problem to cover infinity anytime we want rather rapidly. But we will go in and out of this place through those wonderful gates. Verse 14 says, "The wall had 12 foundation stones, and then the 12 names of the Apostles of the Lamb were put on those stones." God then identifying the old covenant people and the new covenant people in a wonderful way. I love the fact in verse 14 that he mentions the Lamb, the sacrificial name of Christ. He will forever and ever always be the Lamb. Verse 15, he uses a gold reed, usually considered to be about a 10 foot standard of measure, measuring and finding it's perfectly symmetrical in its design, as long as it is high as it is wide. Did you know that that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple was a cube 20 by 20 by 20? This is the Holy of Holies of eternity. This will be 2.25 million square miles. And could hold a hundred thousand million, or a hundred billion people. There will be plenty of room for all of us, but there's not going to be any confining there for us. It's big enough for the few who find the narrow way, but it certainly doesn't confine them. Glorified bodies couldn't get too crowded anyway, I don't imagine. And even if you did bump into somebody, they're perfect so they wouldn't care. And if you have a cube, if you have a cube, you've got all kinds of things piled on top of each other, streets upon streets upon streets upon streets. The thing would actually go from the tip of Florida to the tip of Maine stacked up. Incredible. Millions of golden avenues intersecting. A place of majesty, a place of beauty.

Verse 18, "And the material of the wall was jasper," diamond crystal clear walls, blazing with glory. Why that? Because emanating out of the middle of that thing is the glory of God, and it needs to have transparent stone to flash through. And again you're back to this sparkling diamond that's coming out of the sky. It says, look at this, the material of the wall was jasper; the city was pure gold like clear glass. You tell me, have you ever seen pure gold like clear glass? Not me. I've never seen pure gold like clear glass. Pure gold is anything but like clear glass. Pure gold you can't see through, clear glass you can. You say, "What kind of gold is this?" I don't know, John didn't know either. It

must have sparkled with a brilliance and a glow that had a golden tone but it was still crystal clear.

And by the way, we'll have different perceptions anyway. Something could be solid and still transparent. After all, Jesus in His glorified body walked through a wall. So, we don't really know specifically what it means. But everything you look at is transparent. And that's to demonstrate that the glory of God is blazing through. It's very much like Ezekiel's description. The radiance of the glory of God shining through every substance and reflecting through every diamond cut the unhindered beauty of the presence of infinite God.

And then he describes the foundation. Adorned with every kind of precious stone. "The first foundation of stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst." Now, I don't know what to say about that other than to say it's just unbelievable beauty. Colored jewels forming a dazzling picture, transparent glass, diamonds, gold color, the whole thing is beyond description. That's the majesty of heaven.

Now, do you love beauty? Do you love beauty? I mean, do you like it after it rains to see the green and the, well, imagine looking at this. I mean, God has planted in the human heart an esthetic love. We love beauty. This is transcendent beauty, which will generate in the heart of a glorified man or woman a euphoria that will last forever. No smog, no pollution, incredible.

And then verse 21 further describes its beauty. "And the 12 gates were 12 pearls." Each one of the gates was a single pearl. Imagine that. Imagine. I don't know how big the gates are, but each of them is one pearl. You say, "I'd like to see that oyster." There never was an oyster, folks. If God wants to make a pearl, He can make a pearl. He doesn't need an oyster. But each gate is one pearl. Then, the street of the city was pure gold, again like transparent glass.

I love the thought that in order to enter the city you have to go through a pearl. Heaven is entered through a pearl. What's the significance? A pearl is made by a little animal. A little tiny animal. You know what it takes to make a pearl? That animal has to be what? Wounded. And then, as that little wounded animal begins to treat its wound, it creates a pearl. And the thought is that we enter heaven through a pearl symbolic of the one who was wounded for us. And it was through His wounds that He created the pearls that usher us into His holy and eternal presence. Heaven is entered through suffering, travail, by blood, the agony of the cross. No wound, no pearl. And we enter through the pearls made by the wounded redeemer, what a thought. What a thought.

Verse 22, a few special features in heaven. "And I saw no temple in it for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." We said that already. The temple is the presence of God. Verse 23, "The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God is illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb." I mean, it's just blazing light, that's it, lit by the presence of God and the Lamb. "The moon shall be ashamed," Isaiah said. I love that. "And the sun shall be confounded." And verse 24, "And the nation shall walk by its light. And the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." The glory of all other men, the rule of all other men is dissipated into nothingness. All kinds of people will be there. And even the highest people, I think the idea here is even the kings of the world, the noble men, the high and the mighty, if you will, will give up their glory for the glory of heaven. The nations, all the nations, all the nations will walk in the light of God's presence and all men, even the kings of the earth, will bow to His glory.

Verse 25, "And in the daytime," and the daytime will be all the time for there will be no night there, its gates will never be closed. Never closed. The city gates were always shut at night; keep out robbers and brigands and trouble makers, other armies. But since there's no night, the gates will never shut. Perfect freedom, perfect security, come and go as you want, perfect protection. "And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it." You see, nothing is going to rival God's glory. Nothing.

Verse 27, "And nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it, but only those, oh, I love this, "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." No one will ever be in there but the people whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life, who put their faith in Christ. No rivals for the glory of God. No rivals for honor. The nations will bring all their glory in and all their honor in and deposit it at God's throne. "He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal." And again, everything is crystal, transparent, so that the light of God can shine through. This is coming out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life bearing 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, or the wholesomeness of the nations.

Back in the Garden of Eden, you remember, that there was a beautiful river with four branches that watered the garden. And here, we find the heavenly city is gloriously presenting flowing right out of the throne right down the middle of the city a crystal clear celestial river. It's just a scene of majesty that is absolutely indescribable.

Psalms 46:4 says, "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." You see, a river, do you imagine, do you know what a river was to a Jew living in a barren place like Palestine? A river was a welcome place of comfort, and rest, and respite, and refreshment, and sustenance, and cool water in the hot time. A city was a place of protection, and fellowship, and communion, and socialization. And a river meant water to a parched mouth. And God is giving them a heaven that has the epitome of everything that was precious to them. Everything. And to find a tree when you stalked the barren desert for something to eat, the joy of the dwellers, a tree, a tree. You eat for enjoyment. You don't eat for sustenance in heaven. You eat just for the taste, just for the sheer ecstasy of whatever it is they're going to have on that tree. Healing is the word *therapeian* from which we get therapeutic, health giving. The leaves don't provide healing for sickness; they promote the enrichment of life, that's all. They're just for the sheer joy of eating. The water is for the sheer joy of drinking. No substance is needed but all substances are enjoyed. Wow, incredible.

"And there shall no longer be any curse," no more curse. "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it as bondservants shall serve Him. They shall see His face. His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night and they shall not need the light of the lamp nor of the light of the sun because the Lord God shall illumine them, and they shall reign forever and ever." No more curse. No more sin. The throne of God and the Lamb are there. I love what 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, when we're taken to heaven in the Rapture, "So, shall we ever be with," what? "The Lord." We'll never be out of their presence ever, ever, ever. Verse 4, "We'll see His face," intimacy, communion, fellowship. His name will be on our foreheads, that's the symbol of ownership, the identification that we belong to Him.

Now, think of it. Will you think of it? We are talking about sinners fellowshiping intimately in the presence of holy God forever and ever. Listen, it would be a blasphemous thought to speak of being with the eternal God. It would be a blasphemous thought to speak of having personal intimate

fellowship with Christ. It would be a blasphemous assumption to talk about being joint heirs with Christ, to talk about judging the world, sitting on the throne of Christ, being one with God the Father. Those would be blasphemous thoughts were they not all true. Incredible thought. They are all the promise of God to us. And He will write His name on our foreheads. What a thought.

The glory of heaven is the shining presence of God, flashing out in indescribable beauty. That's what heaven's like. Let me close. JA Seiss years ago wrote these beautiful words. "That shining is not from any material combustion, not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out, for it is the uncreated light of Him who is light dispensed by and through the Lamb as the everlasting lamp to the home and hearts and understandings of His glorified saints. When Paul and Silas lay wounded and bound in the inner dungeon of the prison of Philippi, they still had sacred light which enabled them to beguile the night watches with happy songs. When Paul was on his way to Damascus, a light brighter than the sun at noon shone round about him, irradiating his whole being with new sights and understanding and making his soul and body ever afterward light in the Lord. When Moses came down from the mount of his communion with God, his face was so luminous that his brethren could not endure to look on it. He was in such close fellowship with that light that he became informed with light and came to the camp as a very lamp of God, glowing with the glory of God. On the Mount of Transfiguration, that same light streamed forth from all the body and raiment of the blessed Jesus. And with reference to the very time when this city comes into being and place, Isaiah said the moon shall be ashamed and the sun confounded, ashamed because of the out-beaming glory which then shall appear in the New Jerusalem, leaving no more need for them to shine in it, since the light of the glory of God lights it, and the lamb is the Lamb." What a great, great reality. That's what we're headed for, folks. That's what we're headed for.

"I go to prepare a place for you." And Philip says, "Where You going to go? How can we find our way to that place? How can we know where You are? How can we possibly get there?" Do you remember it in John 14? "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus says, You've been with Me a long time, don't you know who I am? That's a key question. You've got to know who I am. Prior to that, Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where You're going." Two questions. We're not sure who You are and we don't know where You're going. Jesus said, "I'm God," to Philip. And to Thomas He said, "You don't need to know where I'm going, all you need to know is I am the way, the truth and the life. And no man comes to the Father," what? "But by Me." You want to go to heaven? Jesus Christ is the way. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we've had a wonderful time tonight. What a joy to be together with those we love. It's been a taste of heaven tonight. We thank You for it. We ask that You'll confirm to our hearts this wonderful vision. Thrill us with what is ahead and may we live in the light of it for Christ's sake. Amen.

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