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The Mission

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Revelation 21

When Heaven Comes Down to Earth - Revelation 21:1-8

There is an old gospel song that says: “Everybody talking about heaven ain’t going there.”

Well, while that might be poor grammar, it’s no doubt good theology. In fact Jesus Himself once said, **“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21).**

But here’s something else; I don’t think most folks who are going there have a really good understanding of what heaven is really going to be like. They know it’s a place somewhere up there and they know they’re going to get a new body when they get there, and they know they’ll never be sad again, and probably do a whole lot of singing.

And to a certain extent all that’s true, but that’s not all there is. In fact, there’s a lot more and we’re going to learn some of that tonight as we make our way through Revelation 21.

So turn with me if would to chapter 21 and we'll begin with verse 1.

The apostle John begins in verse 1:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

This verse always makes Trish sad, because she loves the ocean and the beach and she has a hard time understanding how the earth is going to be better without it. But I assure her and I can assure you, if God does away with the oceans as we know them now, then whatever He does in their place will be much greater, much more beautiful and even more enjoyable than the oceans we have today.

So John sees a brand new heaven and a brand new earth and then he tells us what happened to the first heaven and the first earth. He says they passed away. And we know what that term means. It means to be no more.

The apostle Peter also wrote about this event in **2 Peter 3:10, But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.**

And so that's what will happen at the end of human history and this occurs after the thousand year reign of Christ, and after the Great White Throne Judgment, which we learned about back in chapter 20.

And by the way, the prophet Isaiah also predicted that this would happen back in **Isaiah 65:17**, **“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.**

So God after the judgment of the wicked, God will create a brand new heaven and a brand-new earth.

Now, the Bible speaks of three heavens. The first heaven is the atmosphere and sky; the second heaven is outer space which includes the sun, and the moon, and all the stars and planets; and the third heaven is God's dwelling place.

Now, this heaven John and these other writers are describing is the first heaven, which is the sky, or the atmosphere, directly above our heads. And today, because God has given Satan free reign over the entire earth, this is the domain of Satan.

But after Satan is thrown into hell for good, which occurs after the one thousand year reign of Christ and after the final battle of Armageddon, which we read about last week in chapter 20; this heaven will be destroyed.

In other words, God is going to rid the entire universe of anything that is evil, or corrupt, or had anything to do with sin.

And then He's going to make one which will be similar, but better. It'll be just like your future glorified body. Even though you'll still be you, with all your personality, and gifts, and original physical features, you'll be perfect and immortal.

And this new earth, when God is finished with it, it will probably be recognizable as earth, but it's not going to look and operate like it did before. It'll be better and perfect and it'll be made to last forever.

And so this is part of God's gifts to us, and we'll be able to explore and enjoy this even more beautiful, recreated earth and universe.

And again, when John says here that there will be no more sea, well, that's a reference to the ocean. It does not mean there will not be rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. But the ocean itself will be no more.

If you think about it, the ocean is a great separator. Oceans today separate the nations and the people of the world. But that won't be the case in the new earth. All those who dwell on the new earth will be united both spiritually and geographically; and nothing will ever again be able to separate us.

Next, in verse 2, John sees the appearance of the new Jerusalem.

2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The holy city or the heavenly city, referred to here is called the “new Jerusalem,”. In John 14:2, Jesus calls it the Father’s house. And it will descend and rest on or just above this brand-new earth. And this is of course heaven as it exists today. This is the Father’s house with all the gold and glory and the mansions prepared, and one day it’s literally going to come down to this earth and become the new Jerusalem.

Now, as a believer, you and I have been promised a dwelling place in this golden city of glory. You and I will have a home there forever. And I don’t know what that will be like to live there, and I don’t know all the things we’ll do when we get there, but I just imagine, since God created this new heaven and this new earth, that there will be many, many beautiful sights to see and to enjoy.

Trish and I went to Switzerland and several other countries in Europe a few years ago. And I don’t know if you’ve ever been to Switzerland or seen the photos, but I personally have never in my life seen such beauty. It really is indescribable and as hard as you try you just can’t capture those images with a camera.

And to think that this new earth and heaven will be even more beautiful than that; well that's just beyond my comprehension.

Now, throughout the Bible, the redeemed are referred to as a bride. Israel is called the bride of Jehovah; the church is called the bride of Christ. And here, this new Jerusalem is also called the bride.

Why? Because it contains all the people who belong to God. And one day this city is going to descend out of the heavens like a golden carriage, and with it it's going to bring the entire bridal party of God.

And so that's what John is seeing and writing about in this verse.

And then along with the descent of this Holy City, John hears an announcement from heaven and in verse 3 he says;

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Now, today we know that God dwells with every believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit, but still we're not able to physically see the God we worship. But all that's going to change when heaven comes down. When heaven comes down we will be

able to see God face-to-face; and we will be able to fellowship with God in the physical.

John in **1 John 3:2** wrote, **“We shall see him as he is.”** In other words, our old feeble faith is one day going to be turned into perfected sight.

And then in verse 4, John tells about some things that won't be there: He says,

4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

All of our tears due to death, and mourning, and pain will be gone. And you'll never again shed a tear over the loss of a loved one, because there won't be any more death or pain or separation.

Now, does that mean there'll be no tears at all in heaven?

Well, it doesn't say that exactly and personally I think there will. I think we'll tear up just like we do now sometimes when the Spirit moves us. I think we'll be moved to tears often because of our joy and our laughter and at the sound of the beautiful music we'll have in heaven. And I believe even more often, we'll be moved to tears because of our gratitude. Every time we see Jesus and remember what He did for us, I believe we'll shed tears of joy.

But there won't be anymore tears of sadness, or tears of sorrow or tears from our pain; only tears of joy will remain.

Next, John records an announcement from God.

In verse 5 God confirms what John has just seen.

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

And then in verse 6, God says,

6 "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts."

God's new creation for those who have been redeemed is finished and ready to enjoy forever. And then we're going to get to watch I believe as the Lord follows the pattern He used in the first chapter of Genesis. He's going to recreate light, and then He's going to recreate the planets and the stars and the animal kingdom and everything else in this new earth; and I believe we're going to get to see it happen this time.

Now, in verse 6 God also reminds us that **He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."**

And that means, of course, that there was nothing before Him, and there's nothing beyond Him." The same expression is

used in Revelation chapter 1 and Revelation chapter 22 to describe both God the Father and God the Son.

In other words, both the Father and the Son are without origin and without ending.

And then finally, John hears God make a promise to all believers. Look at the last part of verse 6: He says, **I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.**

This is heaven's fountain of youth. This is eternal life; that gift that Jesus gave His life's blood to pay for. The greatest wedding gift we could ever receive! Amen.

And then in verse 7, another promise is given.

7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

This is not a promise to some special class of Christian. This refers to every Christian—everyone who has placed their faith and their trust in Christ.

1 John 5:4, For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

And then verse 8 reminds us of those who will not inherit the blessings of heaven:

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

And though we all stand here today guilty of many of these crimes and sins, the difference between a believer and one who will inherit the kingdom of God and an unbeliever who will not is the simple fact that we have confessed our sins and repented and asked Christ for forgiveness. But the people John mentions here did not. In fact, these people wanted nothing at all to do with Christ. They were given the same opportunity as we were, but they loved their sin more than they loved God.

And so those who have rejected Christ will be rejected by Christ. And they will experience the “second death” and we talked about that last week and how that will happen just after the white throne judgement.

And remember what else we learned. Death in Scriptures does not mean to be forever annihilated. Death in the Bible always refers to separation. And here they will forever be separated from the Lord.

And then the last half of this chapter describes the New Jerusalem; The Father’s House; And mine and your future home if you’re a genuine believer.

So what's it going to be like?

Well, though we have some details as to what it's going to be like, we have many questions that are unanswered. And though we all have our own ideas about what it's going to be like, the truth is we probably wouldn't be able to comprehend it even if we knew everything about it.

In the foothills of North Carolina, there's a home called the Biltmore Estate. It was built by George Vanderbilt, who was the grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was a businessman who made his fortune in railroads and shipping.

Over a million visitors a year visit The Biltmore Estate, and Trish and I were among them some years back as no doubt many of you have been.

At any rate it was patterned after a French chateau—a really big French chateau, with 250 rooms in all.

Mr. Vanderbilt spared no expense in its construction. The dining-room chairs were modeled after royal thrones. The private bedrooms and sitting rooms were outfitted as if for royalty. There's a table and chess set there that belonged to Napoleon.

Built in the 1800s, this mansion had every modern convenience one could think of: an indoor swimming pool, an elevator. It had indoor hot and cold running water, a bowling alley, and a two-story library and more. It takes dozens and

dozens of landscapers and household servants to keep it all manicured and clean.

In comparison to our homes today; the Biltmore is a really big house with over 175,000 square feet. But compared to your future home, it would look like an old lean-to out in the backyard.

The Apostle John in his Gospel in chapter 14 records a promise that Jesus made to His disciples and us. He said, He was going to His Father's house and He was going to prepare a place for all who believe in Him. And then He also promised that He would return one day to take us all there.

Well, the last half of Revelation chapter 21 gives us the description of at least some of that house. Here in this chapter it's called the new Jerusalem, Jesus called it the Father's House, but you and I know it as heaven.

It's where the spirits of believers go immediately after they die. The moment they take their last breath, they're ushered into this glorious place and into the presence of God to live there forever. And in this vision John this is the house that John has seen descend to the new earth.

Now, I don't want to rush through this part because this is what we live our entire lives to enjoy and this what I hope everyone in this room is looking forward to and striving for. And so we're not going to try and finish tonight. We'll take this up next

week, but I would like for you to read ahead if you would. This last half of chapter 20 and then read chapter 21 as well and we'll get into both those next week Lord willing.