

“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”

Sermon # 6

“Life In The Heavenly City”

Revelation 21:1-23

There is within every human heart a desire for home, this desire for home can only partially be fulfilled in the present. Someday we who have by faith believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior, are going home. As C.S. Lewis said, “If nothing in this world satisfies me, perhaps it is because I was made for another world.”

Jesus assured his disciples in John 14, verses one through three, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

For over two thousand years God Himself has building a city. In Revelation chapters 21 and 22 John uses the term “city” – eleven times to refer to Heaven. But this is not just a figure of speech. The writer of Hebrews wrote, Hebrews 11:13-14,16 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (14) For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.... (16) But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

This morning I want to take you on a brief walking tour of Heaven. I have just two more messages I want to preach, to complete our series on Heaven, next week we will examine, “But What About the Children” and we will complete our series the following week with, “Living in the Light of Eternity.” We could have spent many months on the study of Eternity and I still would not have answered all your questions. I will tell you, that this has been a learning experience for this preacher and it has forced me to think through my own concept of Heaven. I want to commend a couple of books to you if you want more information. Randy Alcorn who is known for his fictional works, many of which touch on the topic of Heaven, has written two non-fiction works. First in his book “In the Light of Eternity” he has written a small concise work on questions concerning Heaven. In the other simply entitled “Heaven,” he has written a comprehensive examination of Heaven as it is revealed in the Bible. And while I do not agree with all his conclusions both books are worth reading. I purchased one copy of his book “Heaven” to put in our church library.

Our most detailed description of Heaven is found in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Turn with me to Revelation 21:1-4.

“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. (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. (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. (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.”

To gain an appreciation for just how marvelous Heaven will be we need to understand the nature and dimension of the city that will be its capital. The New Jerusalem is the crown jewel of the new creation of God. The New Jerusalem is not all of Heaven, but it is the capital city of Heaven.

There are three things I want us to notice about our new Heavenly Home.

Let’s imagine that we are standing on a vast plain, with the heavenly city towering over us in resplendent beauty. The very first thing that is going to strike our consciousness is the sheer immense-ness of this city.

First, The Dimensions of the City (vv. 15-17)

“And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. (16) The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. (17) Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.”

The city at the center of the future Heaven is called the New Jerusalem. The continual coming and going of travelers through the city’s gates suggesting that the city is not the whole of Heaven but merely it’s center or capital.

The size of the New Jerusalem is mind boggling. It is the answer to anyone who has ever asked, “How is Heaven going to be big enough to hold all of the saved down through all of the ages?” The city’s exact dimensions are measured by an angel (Revelation 21:15-17) and reported to be cube-shaped with each side measuring twelve thousand stadia (nearly fifteen hundred miles). We don’t have to worry that Heaven will be crowded for the base of the city alone adds up to more than 200 million square miles. A city this size if placed in the United States would reach from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to the California border. Perhaps even more amazing if we allowed 12 feet per story the city would be more 600,000 stories high.

Some (Alcorn) hold that it is within the vast and beautiful New Jerusalem that we will find the personal dwelling places Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:2, Rev 21:2).

Not Only The Dimensions of the City but

Secondly, The Description of the City

As you enter into the city you are going to stand in amazement. I just want to point out five of the features that John tells us about the New Jerusalem.

The Pearly Gates (vv. 12-13, 21)

All our lives we have heard allusions to “the pearly gates” of Heaven. Is that just a story? Just an embellishment of the truth? Heaven is usually pictured with a single pair of pearly gates. But the Bible says in verse twelve, “Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: (13) three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west....”

(21)..... The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl...”

Not one gate but twelve gates, each made of a single pearl. Some find great significance in the fact that the gates to the Heavenly city are pearls and pearls are only created through suffering and travail. Each time one enters the Heavenly city it should be remembered that entrance is only possible because of the suffering and pain of our Savior.

The Foundation of Precious Stones (vv. 19-20)

“The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, (20) the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.”

After the gates of pearl you will notice the foundations of the city. Normally, foundations lay underground where they cannot be seen. But this is not the case in the New Jerusalem, for the foundation supporting the walls is fully visible and is indescribably beautiful. This great city will be built upon a twelve layer foundation and each of the layers will be a beautiful stone. A building's greatest strength lies in its foundation and the New Jerusalem is not built on one foundation but twelve.

The Streets of Gold (v. 21b)

And as we enter the streets of New Jerusalem we discover that the streets are pure gold. Oh, I know that people think that it just comes from the tradition of folktales. We sing about the streets of gold in the gospel songs but really? Are the streets really gold in Heaven? Yes, I have it on the authority of the Word of God. The second part of verse twenty-one says, “...And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

The Lamb That Is the Light (v. 23)

But the greatest thing in Heaven is not the glory of the city itself. Beyond the glory of the city itself, we have the Lamb who is the Light. In verse twenty-three John tells us, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

The prophet Isaiah had predicted in Isaiah 60:19 "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory."

In the New Jerusalem there will be no electric lights, no power generators, no lamps of any kind because they are unnecessary. The presence of light will radiate throughout the city and it will emanate from the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

The brilliance of the glory of Jesus the Son of God will fill the city.

- The River of Life and Tree of Life.

Revelation 22:1-2 says, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." If you want to find the throne of God, all you have to do is follow the river, because the crystal river flows from the throne.

On each side of the river are planted not just a tree but trees of life (plural). The tree of life once stood in the center of the Garden of Eden. After Adam's fall into sin, the tree of life was removed to Heaven where according to Rev 2:7 it is today. The New Jerusalem itself is also in the present Heaven, which will be brought down, tree of life and all and placed on the Earth (Rev 21:2). Just as the tree was apparently relocated from Eden to the present Heaven, it will be relocated again to the New Earth.

The city will be beyond description, but the city will not only be characterized by what is in it but by what is absent from it.

Third, The Distinctions of That City. (vv. 4, 8, 27)

Heaven is characterized as much by the things that will not be there as by the things that will.

Verse four says, "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." No more tears. The Bible does not say there will be no tears in Heaven. He says that

there will come a time that he will wipe away all our tears. There will be no more death. There are no funeral processions or cemeteries in Heaven. No more pain. I believe that are some in this auditorium that live with pain every day of your life. Some of you are physically hurting but you came to church anyway. There is physical pain that you must deal with constantly.

For others of you, the pain is not physical it is emotional pain that you have to deal with, the pain of rejection, the pain of failure, the pain of disappointment ...Pain is a part of life, but God says there will be no more pain.

Heaven is also characterized by the absence of sin. In verse eight John says, "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... (27) But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

In verse eight and verse twenty-seven we are told of those who will not be in Heaven. You might expect for the list to be headed by murderers and sexually immoral or by liars and idolaters but no, the first two on the list of the excluded are "the cowardly and the unbelieving." When it speaks of "cowardly" I believe it refers to individual that always fear to keep them from following Christ. Afraid to take a stand for Christ because of what someone might think or someone might say. The next on the list is the "unbelievers" these would include those individuals who came to church and went through the motions of worship yet never got around to trusting Christ. They may be a good person, even a moral person – but they never trusted Christ. The only ones in heaven will be those whose names are written down in "the lamb book of life."

Conclusion

In C.S. Lewis' wonderful books "The Chronicles of Narnia," the characters who've lived in Narnia have completed their time and work there. In a closing chapter entitled "Further Up and Further In" Aslan, the lion who represents Christ, has come for them in order that he might take them home. They are headed away from Narnia and are about to enter Aslan's land. As they do so they are met with familiar scenes. One of the characters cries out, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

I believe that when we finally enter Heaven, we will say, "This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason I have loved earth is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

If it were not for the hope of Heaven this life would seem to be impossible at times. However, we need to realize that the hope of Heaven is not a means to escaped the difficulties

of life. In fact just the opposite is true, the hope of Heaven is the means by which we can face the realities of life.

We are aliens and strangers in a foreign country called earth. We live in tents, feeble temporary dwellings but we are headed for glorious permanence. We may live on shifting sand now but we are headed every day toward the city with foundations – the city that will never fall - the city whose builder and maker is none other than Jesus Christ, the Carpenter from Nazareth.

Do you know where you are going after you die? Or are you like the Airline pilot that lost his navigation equipment, became disoriented and announced to his passengers. “Ladies and Gentlemen, I have good news and bad news. The Bad news is that we don’t know where we are going. But the good news is that we are making really good time.”

Is your life flying by without any real direction or purpose? Do you have serious doubts about where you are going to spend eternity? Do you have the assurance that if you died today, you would wake up in Heaven, with the Lord Jesus Christ for eternity? Are you sure? If so, praise God! But if not, why not make sure?