Scenes from Heaven

Six Visions of The Risen Christ

A Sermon-based Study for our Small Groups
Introduction

Heaven is popular right now. There are books about heaven and movies based on those books. Even television is getting in on the act and giving us versions of that “better place.” On the one hand, as followers of Jesus we should be excited that people are talking about things that are of eternal significance. But on the other hand, we need to be careful that our knowledge comes from Scripture and not Charlton Heston and Cecil B. DeMille.

During the season of Easter, our readings take us on a tour of six scenes of the Risen Christ from the book of Revelation. It provides us with a wonderful opportunity to unpack the meaning of the resurrection from heaven’s perspective. It also provides us with an opportunity to get scenes of heaven etched into our memory.

As has been said, a picture is worth a thousand words. Pictures stick with us. Pictures shape our imagination and even our longings. Pictures have the power to shape our lives and our character. It is our hope that these six visions of Jesus from Revelation will get stuck in our heads, then, in a way that shapes our hearts and changes our lives.

Digging Deeper

7) The study began by noting the power of pictures to shape our imaginations and cultivate our character. What images captivate your imagination?

8) How have these Scenes from Heaven shaped you? What do you need to do to allow them to more fully captivate your imagination and shape your life as a follower of our Resurrected Lord Jesus?
3) In verse 20, Jesus describes Himself as “He who testifies.”
How is Jesus a faithful witness? What does that mean in terms of the vision of Revelation? In terms of all he taught in word and deed?

4) Jesus further described Himself as the One “coming soon.”
How does the knowledge that Jesus will return both encourage and convict us?

5) Jesus is finally referred to as the One who gives us grace (v. 22). How does remembering the Cross and Resurrection keep us rooted in grace?

6) Grace is not only a gift once given, but is the living water of the Spirit bestowed in the present. How does grace sustain us in the present and keep us looking to our sure and certain future, the hope of glory?

Week One: Revelation 1:12-20

Revelation can be a very confusing and at times frightening book. But the ruling theme of the book is not one that is meant to cause confusion or inspire fright, because that theme is the centrality of Jesus. At the very beginning of Revelation, John, in exile on the isle of Patmos for his faithfulness to Jesus, is given a vision of encouragement to pass on to the Church. While worshiping on the Lord’s Day, he, “turned around to see the voice” he heard behind him, and when he turned to see, he saw Jesus.

It is helpful to remember that John, the beloved disciple, walked with Jesus for three years during His earthly ministry. It was John who ran to the empty tomb on Easter morning and stood gazing in as the reality of the resurrection began to dawn upon him. John knew the earthly Jesus. But now he was going to catch a glimpse into the reality of the One upon whose breast he reclined at the Last Supper.

Getting Started

1) How does/did your family celebrate Easter Sunday?

2) Why do you think Easter gets a full fifty days of celebration in the Church?

Into the Bible

Read Revelation 1:12-20
The sermon suggested that this vision uses Old Testament imagery from Zechariah, Daniel, and Ezekiel to portray Jesus as High Priest, Judge of all, and King as a result of the resurrection. This same glorious Jesus is found in the midst of the Church and holding her in His hand. The Resurrected Christ is present with His people whether they are prospering or suffering.

3) What do we learn from John’s response to Jesus in verse 17? About Jesus? About faith?

4) How does Jesus describe Himself in verse 18? How does this compare with God the Father’s self-description in 1:8?

5) What does it mean that Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades?

6) The vision is given to John, and us, precisely so that we won’t fear. What is Jesus’ message to His disciples in verses 17 and 18? How does His message address our fears?

Week Six: Revelation 22:12-21

The Bible now comes to a close with this final scene. As Michael Wilcock writes, “In Eden the work of creation was finished; at Calvary the work of redemption was finished; in Paradise the voice of God will finally say, concerning the whole of his work, ‘It is done!’” (Wilcock, The Message of Revelation, p. 215). All of this has been brought about by Christ, who once again is described in the same words used of the Father, “the Alpha and the Omega.”

Getting Started__________________________

1) How has this study reinforced or informed your understanding of the person of Jesus and the meaning of the resurrection?

2) The sermon noted that in 22:17, the Holy Spirit, the Church (bride) and individual Christians (him who hears) all proclaim the invitation, “Come!” How does our understanding of our Resurrected Lord impact our witness and evangelism as disciples of Jesus?

Into the Bible________________________________

We are now at the end of a vision given to John as he was suffering in exile on the isle of Patmos because of his faithful witness to the Resurrected Christ. In this final vision of Jesus, we find a threefold description of Jesus that is meant to sustain and encourage us. We would do well to hold the many images of Jesus we have encountered in this study and throughout the Bible in mind as we hear these parting words of Scripture.
Far from intending fright, Jesus reveals His glory to assure us that He gave His life for us and that He will defeat all God’s enemies. We are meant to live in the hope that Jesus will give life to those who follow Him.

7) How strong is your experience of peace and the hope of heaven?

8) How do you think John’s understanding of Jesus impacted his willingness to suffer as a witness for Him?

9) What can you do with this vision/picture to help strengthen your hope? Your witness?
Week Two: Revelation 5:1-14

Getting Started

1) When you think of Jesus, what images come to mind most frequently?

2) The sermon suggested that when John was weeping (5:4) that no one in heaven or on earth could open the scroll of God’s plan of redemption and judgment, that it is the great horror that the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come,” will not be answered. How would that be the great horror?

Into the Bible

Read Revelation 5:8-10

In this vision, we see Jesus take the scroll of the Father’s plan of judgment and redemption and the worship that follows. Visually, we move in concentric circles beginning at the very throne of God. At the center of the throne, we find Jesus, and immediately surrounding Him we find the four living creatures who represent God’s world and the twenty-four elders who represent God’s people.

3) In the hands of the twenty-four elders are the prayers of the saints which we are told in 6:9-11 are a call for divine vindication of martyred believers. In a larger sense, the prayers of the saints are for God’s Name to be duly honored. How do you think our vision of God is linked to the content of our prayers?

4) How is fruitfulness an undoing of the effects of sin?

5) The Garden described in Eden is now a Garden-city as humanity has been fruitful and brought her best into God’s presence. Where are God and the Lamb to be found? How is this a restoration of Eden?

6) What is significant about there being no night and needing no lamps for light?

7) It appears that the main activities of heaven are for humanity to worship God and join in His reign over the universe. How is this what God always wanted for humanity?

Digging Deeper

8) In the Old Testament, to see God’s face was to die (Exodus 33:20). In the gospels, to see Jesus was to see the Father, albeit in veiled form (John 14:9). In Revelation, we will not only see His face and live, but we will bear His name on our forehead. How does this cultivate hope in your life? How does it cultivate strength to persevere?
Week Five: Revelation 21:22—22:5

Getting Started

1) The sermon discussed Revelation 21:22-27 in light of Isaiah 60, and suggested that these verses are an incredible summary of the gospel of Christ. The imagery of the “glory and honor of the nations” being brought into the presence of God points to the value of our earthly work. How does this change the way you view your work?

2) Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life can enter God’s eternal presence. How does this image summarize the gospel?

Into the Bible

In this passage, the story of Creation comes full circle as we see the Garden of Eden restored, sin’s curse removed, and life found in abundance.

Read Revelation 22:1-5 and skim Genesis 1-2

3) The first chapters of the Bible tell how God made the world. The last chapter of the Bible tells how God will restore it. What are some parallels between the Genesis account and this portion of Revelation?

4) In verse 9, they begin to sing a “new song” reminiscent of Psalm 96, which celebrates God’s victory over His enemies. What is the reason for Christ’s worthiness to be addressed with this praise?

5) According to verses 9-10, what was God’s intention for the Cross of Christ?

6) The death and resurrection of Jesus have redeemed for God a royal and priestly people. What does it mean that we are to be “a kingdom and priests to serve our God?”

Our vision now moves a bit further out from the throne as we hear the hymn of the angels who encircle the living creatures and the elders. It is worth noting in passing that humanity is closer to the throne than the angels! From there, we will move even further out as the hymn of the whole cosmos brings the hymns to a climax.

Read Revelation 5:11-14
7) The same ascriptions given in the Bible to the Father are in these two hymns being given to Jesus. What does that tell us about who Jesus is?

8) The scene closes with the four living creatures, God’s world, saying “Amen,” and the elders, God’s people, worshipping. How might the Great Amen at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer point to this scene?

Digging Deeper

9) Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray “Hallowed be Thy Name.” The prayers of the saints before the throne are for God’s Name to be known and honored. Does the content of your prayers need to change to include an earnest desire for God’s Kingdom to come and His Name to be hallowed? If so, what can be done?

10) How does keeping the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus central change the way we live?

3) Describe the contrast between the Whore and the Bride.

4) Read Philippians 2:12. How do we participate in dressing ourselves for Christ?

5) Read Philippians 2:13. How is our clothing God’s gift?

6) Read Ephesians 5:25-27. How does the imagery of the Bride of Christ speak to the relationship God has in store for the Church?

Digging Deeper

7) How does the imagery of the Bride of Christ bring comfort and encouragement to you?
Week Four: Revelation 19:1-9

This week we glimpse a vision of the final destruction of all that is opposed to God. Babylon the Whore riding the beast, representing a godless society, is vanquished. It is helpful to imagine a vast crowd watching the spectacle unfold on the tiny stage of the world. God’s people in the world have been threatened by Babylon and the beast, reaching up, as it were, from beneath the stage to corrupt the Church. But God has reached down with salvation for his Church, and now the crowd erupts in song as the successor to Babylon prepares to take the stage.

Getting Started

1) What makes a good wedding memorable to you?

Into the Bible

2) The sermon spoke of how one aspect of the Cross of Christ is the defeat of Satan, pictured in this passage as the destruction of Babylon the Whore. How is Babylon an apt description of how Satan seeks to corrupt and destroy the people of God?

With her destruction, Babylon’s successor appears on the stage: the Bride of Christ. The contrast is meant to be striking.

Read Revelation 17:3-5 and 19:7-8

Week Three: Revelation 7:9-17

Getting Started

1) What was one of your favorite vacations? What was it about it that made it so enjoyable?

Into the Bible

2) The sermon spoke of how one aspect of the Cross of Christ is the defeat of Satan, pictured in this passage as the destruction of Babylon the Whore. How is Babylon an apt description of how Satan seeks to corrupt and destroy the people of God?

With her destruction, Babylon’s successor appears on the stage: the Bride of Christ. The contrast is meant to be striking.

Read Revelation 17:3-5 and 19:7-8

2) According to verse 14, how does one come to stand before God in this great multitude?

3) The language of a royal priesthood emerges again in verse 15. In fact, the word for “temple” refers specifically to the inner sanctuary (naos) where only the priests could go in the Old Testament. What does this imagery say about God’s desire to draw us close in His presence?
4) Verse 15 goes on to say that the One seated on the throne will spread His “tent” over His people. The word “tent” refers to the Old Testament tabernacle. How does it make you feel to know that God desires to shelter you in the wilderness with His very presence?

5) Read John 1:14. This verse can also be translated to say that the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us. Pulling these verses from John and Revelation together, who is our shelter? How does this shelter protect us and fill us with joy?

In verses 16 and 17, we find that all the hardships and difficulties that we endure in this life will be undone. We are told this will be so because the Lamb who was slain on the Cross for our sins is also the Good Shepherd who leads us home into this very presence.

6) Read John 7:37-39. According to these verses, what is this “living water?”

7) How is it that Jesus both provides living water now and leads us to it in the future?

Digging Deeper

8) Do you find suffering, in general or for Jesus, difficult? How can this vision impact your ability to persevere?

9) Where do you need to repent of seeking true joy in places where it cannot be fully found? How can this vision reinforce the truth that true joy is only to be found in Jesus?