

## *A Glimpse of Glory!*

Revelation 21:1-4

November 3, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Revelation 21. Last week we talked about death for a Christian and how Paul helped us understand the contrast between the temporary tents of our bodies and the permanent houses God is building for us in heaven. We also looked at his metaphor of our physical bodies being the jars that hold the liquid of our souls and spirits and what happens when the jars and the tents are destroyed. We talked about how, for a Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord with no soul sleep, no purgatory, and no other intermediate state in between. But what is heaven like? I wish I had some slides to show you but they didn't turn out.

In his book *The Breadbasket*, Paul Brubaker tells what some 7 year olds said when asked, "What is heaven?" Susan said, "It's a place that don't look like here cause God don't have no schools up there, and I'll be glad." Eric said, "It's a place where there's money laying around. You can just pick it up and play with it and buy things." Tommy said, "I know what heaven is, but I don't wanna go there right now. I wanna go to North Carolina." And David said, "Heaven is sort of big and they sit around playing harps. I don't know how to play a harp but I suppose I'd better start learning to play pretty soon!" Daniel finished it off by saying, "It's like a blue sky with clouds, and it's really a fun place because you can play on the clouds. You have to stay away from the edges though, or you'll fall off!" We all have our own ideas about heaven don't we? Today, we want to see what the Bible says about heaven, where are saved loved ones are right now and what they are experiencing. To help us with that, please stand as we read from Rev 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

What a beautiful vision John sees and records for us here in Revelation! And it's one I often share at funerals and memorials and rightfully so for it reveals to us a bit of what heaven is and will be like. Certainly there is a part of this prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled in that the first heaven and earth have not yet passed away, but it does give us a glimpse of what it's like living with God presence. Although the Bible doesn't tell us everything we'd like to know about heaven, from what it does tell us, I can't wait to go there, amen? Someone said once that if God told us everything about heaven, we'd be jumping off buildings to get there. And that is not His will. As we said last week, we

leave our departure dates to Him, but it is a fantastically wonderful place.

That is true because God is there. Say God. It may seem obvious but let's think about what that means. What do we know about God? God is peaceful so heaven is a place of perfect peace. Unlike this world with its wars and rumors of wars. With our quarrels and fights and lawsuits. With its political attacks and constant conflict. There is none of that in God's presence. All is peace forevermore on that happy golden shore. A land that is fairer than day, in the sweet by and by. That's what our saved loved ones are enjoying right now!

We've talked before about the Hebrew word Shalom. It is usually translated as peace, but it's so much more than just the absence of conflict. It is total well-being. All is well. All is well physically, spiritually, emotionally, socially, etc. It is well physically because just like ice cannot exist in a fiery furnace, no disease can exist in God's presence. There is no cancer, heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis in heaven. There's no need for hospitals, doctors, or medications. There aren't any funerals or memorial services for there is no death. Death has been swallowed up by victory! By what is truly life! If you're born twice, you will only die once! But if you're only born once, and never born again, you will die twice.

No Mores (George Bowers)

Heaven's quite a place, for what it does without,  
No sickness and no sadness, no unbelief or doubt.  
No labor, toil, or sweating, no hopelessness or sighing,  
No more disease or handicaps, no cancer and no dying!  
No more bitter warfare, no more strife or hate,  
No more separation, or divorcing from one's mate.  
No more financial worries, no work related stress,  
Only heaven's finest, and all God's perfect best!  
No more disappointment, our hearts will not be broken,  
And no foul word or phrase, will ever there be spoken.  
No more wicked sin, no selfishness or greed,  
No more stolen property, or any evil deed.  
No more of Satan's tricks, no more fear or fright,  
No more curse of any kind, and no more dark of night.  
No more sleepless misery, no tossing in the bed,  
No more aches or problems, raging through your head.  
I can't wait for heaven, not just for golden floors,  
But all the things that won't be there, the land of great no mores!

Now let's be clear that some passages we read here speak to the current state of heaven, some refer to the future new heavens and earth, and some seem to refer to the

thousand year reign of Christ. It's sometimes hard to know which is which, but suffice it to say that wherever God is there is freedom, perfection, peace, and blessing. And He has promised to never leave us so stay close to Him!

Heaven is and will be a place of great joy. Why? Not only because of what's not there, sickness, disease, pain, and death, but because of Who is! Say Jesus! When we're in His presence and the reality of the great grace of His death and resurrection become crystal clear to us, we will erupt with joy and praise. Isaiah 35 says, "10 ... The [ransomed of the Lord] will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Everlasting joy and eternal gladness, no more sorrow or sighing, no more death or dying. And everyone said? Heaven is a place of great joy.

Heaven is a place of worship. Say worship. This passage tells us of the singing in heaven! Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 and other passages that give us glimpses reveal magnificent praise and worship of God. If you don't like worshipping Him here, you're going to be miserable in heaven. And it will be perfect worship! You won't be able to keep from worshipping! But let me say, if you don't like worshipping here, you probably need to examine your relationship with Jesus to make sure you won't end up where there is no worship.

Heaven is sometimes called paradise. Say paradise. Before Jesus died and rose again, the righteous dead couldn't yet be in God's presence so instead of going to heaven, they went to a place called paradise, or as Luke 16 calls it, Abraham's bosom. And while it was a wonderful place, it was not nearly as rich and full as heaven itself. After Jesus died and rose, the Bible says He led captives in His train as He emptied paradise and took them directly into God's presence where they are now. But our word paradise still applies. A place of lush beauty, plenty, rest, joy, etc. that far surpasses even the best paradise on this earth! I hate to tell Tommy, but heaven has NC, Hawaii, and every other earthly paradise beat all to pieces.

Heaven is also a place of feasting. Say food. Different times when Jesus referred to heaven, He spoke of banquets and feasts. Of parties and celebrations. How many of you like feasts and celebrations? And this will be the grandest of them all! The richer the host, the better the party! And when we consider that God does everything exceedingly abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, we know His banquet is going to far surpass the Wood Grill, Golden Corral, and Red Lobster combined! So our loved ones are there celebrating, feasting, and worshipping even as they await our arrival.

Turn to Heb 4:9-11. The Bible tells us heaven is a place of rest. Say rest. This passage says, "There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest..." Here we hustle and bustle. We go and

go. We work and get weary. But not there. Our loved ones are resting from their labors. And their works do follow them, meaning that they will receive rewards from their Lord for that which was righteous and holy. Every faithful prayer, every time they glorified God in word or song, every time they taught a child or adult about God's goodness and Jesus' gift, every cup of cold water or other good deed they did for others, every dime they invested in Jesus' Kingdom. All their works do follow them. I don't know about you, but I like resting. It's good to rest. It's good to slow down and take it easy from time to time. I believe we will have some rewarding tasks to do in heaven like Adam and Eve did in the garden before the fall, but they won't exhaust us. They will be refreshing, energizing, even restful.

Let's not get this mixed up with soul sleep which we mentioned last week. Our bodies will lie in the ground resting until the trumpet sound. They will sleep until they are awakened by Jesus' heavenly alarm clock. We'll say more about that in a minute but while our bodies sleep in the ground awaiting their resurrection, our souls live on in God's presence, even as our loved ones do now.

Can they see us on earth? If so, the Bible doesn't say so. I don't think they can. God can, obviously, He sees all. But if heaven is a place of joy, celebration, and happiness, that would be sorely ruined by a single glance at this earth full of hatred, disobedience and pain. Can God inform our loved ones about us? Certainly He can for He is aware of all, but whether He does or not, we do not know. I seriously doubt our loved ones are "looking down on us," for their glories of heaven would revert to the horrors of earth pretty quickly.

While we're talking about common folklore, misconceptions cloaked in spiritual clothes, let's address another false teaching. Our loved ones do not become angels. Say not angels. In spite of what you read on Facebook or hear in songs. That's bad theology. The Bible says we will be **like** the angels, but we will not be angels. Angels are separate created beings. God didn't gain another angel when our loved one died. The number of angels was fixed by God when He created them. They cannot procreate and humans do not become them. Jesus didn't die to redeem angels. He died to save humans who alone are made in His image. Ours is a future better than angels! Don't lower your anticipation to that of an angel. We may or may not play harps but you don't have to worry about falling off a cloud.

Will there be animals in heaven? Dogs yes, cats no. Cats will be in the other place. No, I believe there will be. Isaiah tells us about lambs laying down with wolves and bears with calves. Some say that is all symbolic but as I've gotten older, I've learned to take God more and more literally. He usually is. But for those of you who hate snakes it also talks about a young child sticking his hand in a viper's nest. Without getting hurt. The sting, the poison, the venom is all removed. In Revelation 19, the armies of heaven are riding on white horses. If God created animals on the first earth, why

wouldn't they be on the second? Are they the same animals that we know here? I don't know, but they could be. Some things we'll just have to wait and find out. Whatever the case, I can assure you that you will not be disappointed in heaven in any way!

Now, what exact state our saved loved ones are in right now, I don't know. I know they are in heaven, but how they exist there I do not know. I Thessalonians that we read last week certainly tells us that all the dead bodies of Christians will be raised and transformed. We will be given new bodies that will last forever. And Paul tells us more about those bodies in I Corinthians 15. Vs 35 But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ...42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ... 49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man (Adam), so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (Jesus). 50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."

So our bodies, both those raised from their graves as well as those of Christians alive at that time, will all be changed instantaneously. A new type of created body. An immortal everlasting, imperishable, powerful body. Bring it on! 1 John 3:2 tells us, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." So if we're going to be like Jesus' resurrected body, we'll be able to pass through walls and unopened doors, speak and eat, even cook fish.

Will we know each other? Why wouldn't we? I certainly hope I'm not going to be any dumber than I am here! At the Transfiguration, Jesus' disciples knew Moses and Elijah even though they'd never met them before. In Luke 16, Abraham knew Lazarus and Lazarus knew him. When Jesus mentioned the great heavenly feast in Matt 8:11, He says, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." We will still have our identities in heaven and in fact will be more our true selves than we ever were for we will no longer be corrupted by sin. 1 Cor 13:12 says, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." Oh I believe we will know each other in

heaven more fully than we ever did on earth.

In CS Lewis' novel, *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe*, the enemies of Aslan, the Lion, have killed him on a stone table in place of the humans who had sinned. But then there's a mighty earthquake and the stone table splits in two cracked right down the center and Aslan the Lion awakes! Raised to life! As we sang last Sunday, Christ the Lion awakes! With resurrection power for all who will receive Him! Reminding us of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who rose triumphant from His grave with new life for all who will trust Him for it!

But I must tell you today, there is no eternal life in anyone else. Muhammad never rose from the dead. Nor did Buddha nor Hare Krishna nor Confucius. Only Jesus. And if you want to enjoy the beauty and bounty of heaven we've caught a glimpse of today, if you want your body raised to life and transformed in an instant, you must trust in Jesus. No one else can get you into heaven and no one else can give you resurrection power because no one else has it.

Let me close today with the last part of I Cor 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let **nothing** move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Oh dear friends, Jesus has taken the stinger out of death! He has given us the victory! That we might enjoy a place so much better than even North Carolina. So stand firm, keep working for Jesus, knowing that there is a heaven ahead.