

0328

Heaven and the temple

Sunday, April 16, 2023

### Text

<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

<sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

<sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

<sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## Prayer

### Introduction

In Randy Alcorn's wonderful book, *Heaven*, he tells a story of an English minister who was asked by a colleague what he expected after death. The man replied: "Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects."

Our views of heaven are too lowly.

In life, things often times leave us disappointed.

A movie looks incredible in the previews....and then you see the movie and realize every funny scene was basically shown in the preview.

People rave about a restaurant, and you think it's just ok.

We vote for a politician who we think will fix things, but they just give us more of the same.

And there are other examples.

Perhaps that's part of the reason why our views of heaven are too low. Because of earth. We live in a fallen world where there is sin and hurt and where things are never quite right.

And maybe because of that, and because of sin, because of what we hear about and see in the world, because of the experiences we have. Maybe because of something in our own life where we still question where God was at, we have a view of heaven like HEAVEN could be just one more place to disappoint.

Like heaven could be overrated. Like we could find it underwhelming.

With all of the confusion about heaven, there should be no confusion about this: heaven is going to be perfectly awesome!

It is not going to disappoint. You'll never be there and feel like it didn't live up to all of the hype.

Heaven will never be boring. Your worst day on heaven will be better than the greatest day of your life. How do I know that? Because we have a good God who made heaven.

It is my prayer today that the hope of heaven can stir our love for God.

Ultimately our home is the New Heaven and the New Earth, and within those, God has his holy city, the New Jerusalem, which is the subject of our passage this morning.

## Thesis

The main point of this text today is that heaven is going to be perfectly awesome.

And in this passage, we see that through the appearance of heaven and the perfection of heaven.

## Exegesis

First thing I want to talk about, the look of heaven.

John is given a vision.

Now he is not actually in the New Jerusalem. But he's given a revelation of it.

Verses 10-11:

**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, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.**

He carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem.

In verse 11, John says that this city had **“the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.”**

So this vision of the city coming down is a spectacular site to behold.

The Glory of God.

Think of glory almost like weight, or mass, the heaviness of God’s awe-inspiring glory.

Something else to consider. In the Book of Revelation, in the previous chapter, it talks about the presence of God in heaven and it says that from his presence, earth and sky fled away. God is massively glorious.

And John begins to describe the city more specifically

In verses 12-14, the city is described as having a great wall with 12 gates. There are 12 gates inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. In verse 14, John mentions twelve foundations with the names of the 12 apostles. This is showing completion in God’s divine plan. There are three gates on each side of the city. This shows the openness through which the people of God are permitted to enter the city. Later in the chapter, it talks of how the gates never close.

The reason why they never close is because the enemies of God have been vanquished and defeated. There is no danger in this city.

As the vision continues, John sees the angel who is showing him this vision, measuring the New Jerusalem

Verses 16-17:

**The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.**

The angel measuring the city alludes back to Zechariah 2:2. The measuring of the city is showing the exactness of God's plans and his completion. The city is 12,000 stadia. A stadia is roughly 600-640 feet.

So 12,000 stadia would be about 1,500 miles.

So this city is massive.

1,500 miles could take you to any place in the eastern United States. 1,500 to the south, you'd be in Mexico. 1,500 miles to the west, you could make it as far as Las Vegas.

So it's a very large place.

Verse 16 says "Its length and width and height are equal."

So the city is shaped like a big cube.

Then the angel measures the wall of the city. 144 cubits, which would mean that the wall is over 200 feet high.

Now 200 feet for a wall is pretty small for a city that's 1,500 miles high!

But again, we must remember that the purpose of the wall is not protection. It's for boundaries.

The New Jerusalem is within the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Also the wall serves to radiate and reflect back the glory of God.

**<sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.**

It is undoubtedly a spectacular site to behold. Standing at this great, high wall, and looking from side to side and as far as you can see, you could drive for hours and hours and hours and not come to the end of it, a wall and the foundations of it are these spectacular stones.

### Mediation

We have a lot of stereotypes about heaven.

We do tend to have the cartoon view with harps on clouds in white robes.

We aren't going to be standing on clouds. It's a new earth. And we are going to live there eternally. We will be resurrected bodily, which is talked about in chapter 20. So we aren't going to be spirits or ghosts.

Now just think about this earth....

There's a lot to it.

Imagine if money were no object, you had the time, you could travel everywhere on earth you wanted to go to?

Think about how much there is to explore?

Who here likes earth? Who here has things that you like? Or maybe it's not even places you've been to personally but that you've heard of or that you'd like to see? I think of some of the great artworks in Europe. Amazing beaches, different architectural achievements. Spectacular rainforests.

I think about when I lived in Minnesota. Beautiful state. When I first moved there, before I met Kari, on my days off, I'd just drive around, sometimes to different parts of the state and take pictures.

And that's just one part of one state in one country.  
There are lots of spectacularly beautiful places in our world.

So heaven isn't going to be standing on clouds: it's a new heaven and a new earth.

The image of heaven in cartoons and movies is that we'll all be playing harps.

First of all, they are other instruments mentioned in Revelation in visions of heaven!

I think the harp has become the stereotype because it does have a heavenly sound.

But yes, there will be music. Music is a good thing.

And there will be food. We won't eat because we need food to sustain us but for the sake of enjoying a meal.

Heaven is going to be awesome.

You might secretly fear the idea of heaven because you find yourself thinking "is it just going to be like a worship service for the rest of eternity?"

Your sermons only last like a half hour and even THOSE push me to the brink. How am I going to deal with this forever?!

I think part of the answer to that question relates to what you consider worship...

For you, is worship just something you push through on a Sunday morning? Something that you just put up with?

Or do you have an entire life that is worshipful? Does your devotion to God influence your daily routine? How you raise your kids? How you love your spouse? Turning to God in prayer? When you enjoy a good meal or see a beautiful sunset, is that to the glory of God?

In short, do you live a lifestyle that revolves around a love for God?

Or do you compartmentalize? “I’ll go to church for an hour, for the church box...but for other things I do, those are for me?”

Yes there is worship in heaven!

It’s the presence of God.

In heaven, it’ll be a better and truer form of worship.

Have you ever been praying or studying the Bible....and then you think “I forgot to get milk....

Then you get back to praying....

I need to check what the weather is going to be like today...

Then you get back to praying....

How is it already almost My?!

And just one distraction after another? Or you feel like you’re battling just to keep focused?

In heaven, you won’t be dealing with the stresses of life: missed appointments, issues with finances, family stresses, health concerns.

Heaven. Will. Be. Awesome.

Because God is awesome. God is good and heaven is the place that he has made for his people.

And there are things about heaven we can’t even imagine.

How are you living right now? Are you someone who’s basically a moralist? You’re a good person. Good things should happen to you because you’re a good person. And yeah, God’s ok. And if there’s something good for following him, I’ll have that? But in reality, you’re pretty lukewarm to loving God?



Or do you love God? Do you have a desire to know him?

Ultimately we can have a taste of that now. But to just know that it doesn't compare with the reality that it will be to actually be in heaven in the presence of a holy God.

In the Great Divorce, CS Lewis says:

*the Blessed will say 'We have never lived anywhere except in Heaven,' and the Lost, 'We were always in Hell.' And both will speak truly."*

I'm not saying this to be cynical or snarky. But if you dread the idea of worshiping God in heaven, I think you might need to develop a greater love for worshiping him on earth.

But no. Heaven will not be a church service for all eternity. It's a new heaven and a new earth.

Other images that the Bible uses: it's a great feast!

Who doesn't love a great feast?!

Great conversations and laughter. Music, not just from harps!

The Bible compares heaven to a wedding.

Now in America, we go pretty over the top with weddings. But there are other cultures that take it further than we do.

And in the first century world in which this book was written, wedding celebrations could last for a week.

Wonderful times of joy and laughter.  
Heaven. Will be perfectly awesome.

A wedding, a feast.

It's not "come, join us at the jury duty selection pool of the Lord.."

There will be wonderful company in heaven. You'll be able to see Jesus. The Lord who took the penalty for our sins. You'll be able to see him face to face.

And you'll be you. And you'll know who these people are.

Now in the movie Men and Black, Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones are federal agents who deal with people who have seen aliens. And when they question a person who has seen an alien, they pull out a device that looks like a pen, and it erases their memory.

Heaven isn't like that. We aren't going to become robots in heaven. We will still be ourselves. There are heavenly visions of different Biblical figures. They're themselves. The point of making unique humans was not so that we could all become exactly the same.

There will be work in heaven. Work is something which exists in the Bible before the fall. Work is good. It won't be drudgery. It won't be "I have to do that shift in heaven today."

But heaven is not an eternal stay at a retirement community. For Biblical reasons, I believe there will be animals in heaven.

Isaiah 65:25 points to the future time of restoration and the peace that will exist with animals.

**The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
and dust shall be the serpent's food.  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain,"  
says the Lord.**

You'll be able to walk through vast fields, and hear the mighty roar of a lion, but there will be nothing to fear.

Perhaps even pets....at least dogs.  
No cats.

Animals existed before the fall and were part of God's good and perfect creation.

This is because the restoration is not just of humanity. God is restoring the physical world: it's a new Heaven, a new Earth, a New Jerusalem. He's restoring people, and he's restoring animals. The book of Romans says that the whole creation is groaning. Sin affects everything.

But there will be no sin in the New Jerusalem. A perfect place.

Heaven should be a source of joy.

And the point of the new earth is not for God to make a place that's WORSE than where we currently live.

But even for Christians, there's this constant temptation to think that this life is the pinnacle of our existence.

It isn't.

We'll have greater perspective in heaven. We'll continue to learn and marvel at the eternal glory and goodness of God in heaven.

People often times ask me great theological questions. Some we simply cannot answer.

In the presence of the Lord.

I remember at my former church in Minnesota. Someone had passed away and I remember the pastor saying on Sunday "I can promise you that she's a much better theologian than I am right now."

Marveling at the face of God.

You'll still be you in heaven. There are places in the New Testament where people like Peter see Old Testament figures. They're still them. You're still you in heaven.

You don't become an angel. That's not a Biblical idea.

You don't become a divine figure.

You'll be you, but in the presence of God, you will be so sanctified that you'll be you without sin.  
It is a perfect place.

Revelation 21:4

It will be a place where God will:

**wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**

For the things that have been struggles. For the things where we've suffered, in heaven, somehow, some way, they will be made right. Perhaps heaven will be so glorious that we just won't care.

Or perhaps we'll have a different perspective and see how all things really did work together for our good.

I think we get glimpses of that right now.

Some of us have experienced things that we wouldn't wish on anyone.

But we know that without them, we wouldn't be who we are today.

## II. No temple

In verse 22, John says he saw no temple in the city.

**And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.**

That fact is immensely important and I'm going to unpack that in a moment.

He does give the reason why in the second half of verse 22: the reason why he saw no temple in the city was because the city's **"temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."**

Not only that, but the city has no need for sun or moon to shine, for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the lamb.

So God's glory illuminates the New Jerusalem. Keep in mind, we're not talking about a crawl space that God is lighting. Maybe 1500 miles doesn't sound like much to you....I mean you could drive that in a couple days....but we're talking 1500 miles by 1500 miles by 1500 miles...that 1500 cubed...that's over 3.3 BILLION cubic miles.

It's a perfect cube.

### Validation

Again, this last part of the chapter talks about how the New Jerusalem doesn't need a temple.

The significance of that can get lost on us if we aren't thoughtful.

I talk a lot about temple themes in the Bible.

And that theme comes to its Biblical culmination in this passage.

What's a temple?

In its most basic form, the temple is the place where God meets with his people.

Just like how I think we oftentimes have a wrong view of heaven, especially if we picture it to be boring, I think we can have a low view of the Temple.

Again, the presence of the Lord with his people.

All throughout the Bible, including to the present day, there is this theme of temple.

I want to list a few things:

The Garden  
The Tabernacle  
The Temple

Jesus  
The Church  
The New Jerusalem

Maybe the connection between these six places isn't obvious, but they all represent the presence of God.

In the Garden, Adam and Eve live in the presence of God in a perfect place.

Because of sin, they were cast out.  
But God remained faithful.

He chose a man, Abraham to be the father of many nations, and the patriarch of God's chosen people.

From Abraham, came Isaac who fathered Jacob who fathered 12 sons who represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

The Israelites were originally held in captivity in Egypt. After God had miraculously freed them, and while the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God gave them instructions for the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent structure that the Israelites were to travel with and it was a symbol for God's presence with his people.  
Exodus 40:34-35

**Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.**

Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the plan was for them to build a permanent temple which would be a place to represent God dwelling with his people.

This happened during the reign of Solomon  
And we see the presence of the Lord filling his temple in 1 Kings 8:10-11:

**And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, <sup>11</sup> so that the priests could not stand to minister**

**because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.**

In both places, when the presence of the Lord comes into the temple, people can't even stand in it because the presence is so glorious.

And in the Old Testament, the Temple is hugely important. Building the temple, the people corrupting the temple. God allowing the Israelites to be conquered and the destruction of the temple. The Israelis being released by the Persians for the purpose of rebuilding the temple.

But ultimately, God points forward to an even greater Temple, an even greater example of his presence with his people.

Jesus.

At the beginning of John 1, where it's talking about Jesus, it says "the word became flesh and dwelled among us."

And if you remember from last fall, that word for dwelled, it literally means "he tabernacled" among us. He "pitched a tent" among us. The presence of God on earth.

In John 2, Jesus says to the Pharisees:

**"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."**

They mock Jesus because that seems so absurd but they miss the point that he's referring to himself as the temple.

He is the temple.

After Jesus died and rose and ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit is poured out on all believers.

In Acts 2, this is dramatically described:

**When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>**

**And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

The church is the body of Christ. The believers in the gospel are given the Holy Spirit and we are the temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17:

**Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.**

When I talk about the Church, I mean the Universal Church, not just a church. It's all churches that are faithful to God's gospel. It's not that the church is important in itself. It's not that we're so great. It's that God has given his Spirit to his followers and it is through the Holy Spirit that we are made holy and equipped with Spiritual gifts for the sake of building up God's church.

But still his points forward to a greater Temple, the New Jerusalem

It's a return to the original temple, the garden.

The temple matters because the Temple is God's presence with his people. It's the relationship which was tarnished in the garden. The presence of God, it's what Jesus came to bring.

And while we enjoy fellowship now, and while we should not discount that, it is still merely a shadow of the true fellowship, of being back with God in the new temple that he will build, the new heaven and the new earth. And then here finally in Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem.

The Temple, which has been a constant theme throughout the Bible, we see the return to the temple, the presence of the Lord.

The text says that there is no need for the sun or the moon in this temple. Because God is the light and Jesus is the lamp of the new temple. Notice the glorious and powerful moment it is when the presence of God fills the tabernacle, when it fills the temple. The rushing wind when God's Spirit fills the believers. The enormity of the glory of God in the Bible.



And to be in that presence.

Perhaps you've stood by a water fall and you hear the water, and you see it. And if it's a big water fall, as the countless gallons of water rush down, you feel it in your chest.

The presence of God will never disappoint.

Pondering his glory and holiness and goodness, is something from which we will never tire of in his presence. Because he is infinitely glorious and wonderful. God's presence is so holy and so full of life and vibrance that it is overwhelming.

Heaven is a perfect place.

The final verse of the chapter again drives home the character of heaven.

**27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

Nothing unclean will ever enter it.  
Sin cast us out of the garden.

With the tabernacle and the temple, within those rooms, there was an inner sanctuary where only the high priest could go once a year to make a sacrifice on behalf of the people. One person, one time a year. And there were purification rituals that the person went through before entering because approaching God's Most Holy Place was so sacred.

The dimensions of the Most Holy Place, of the Holy of Holies were equal in terms of height, depth, and width...no coincidence in the New Jerusalem that that Most Holy Place is also a perfect cube.

And to enter requires holiness.  
And that's a holiness we cannot earn.

Because we cannot make ourselves holy. We cannot make ourselves pure.

We are enabled to enter because of the blood of the lamb. He accepts us freely but we have to accept him.

Heaven isn't where a person should want to go because it's better than hell. It's where we want to go because it's the abode of the Lord God Almighty.

It's a place whose light is the Lord God, the Almighty, and whose lamp is the land.