2Series: Heaven

Message: 01 What We Know about Heaven Rev 21\_2-3

Text: Revelation 21:2-3

Theme:

Date: July 1, 2018

Location: Christ Community EFC

Back in May, I was given the wonderful opportunity to go out to Chicago and attend the 2018 Moody Pastors’ Conference.

One evening, after the evening session, I was sitting round talking to a couple pastors. One of them, in his mid-70’s had to retire from ministry to care for his failing wife in the last three years of her life.

Now a year after her passing, he said the thing that has helped him deal with his grief and loss was a renewed and biblically grounded understanding of heaven.

He went on to confess that in his nearly 50 years of ministry he could not remember ever preaching a sermon series specifically on heaven.

Sure he had mentioned heaven and preached on the hope of eternal life. He had shared the gospel message and how we get to heaven.

But he said that had and never really developed a true biblical understanding of just what heaven is going to be like, what will we be doing in heaven, how should the reality of heaven shape our lives and encourage us today?

He went on to recommend this book; “Heaven” by randy Alcorn which I am using as a framework for the series we are beginning today: Heaven.

There is a shorter version called 50 Days of Heaven: Reflections That Bring Eternity to Light which is more like a 50 day devotional.

Let me ask you, when you think of heaven, what do you envision? Share with me some of your thoughts about what heaven will be.

**If you would please turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 21, Revelation 21:1 (page 1041).**

Before we read the text, here are a couple examples of the way people tend to think of heaven.

1. Reads: “I wish I had brought a magazine.”
2. Reads: top panel, “Welcome to heaven….Here’s your harps” lower panel “Welcome to hell…Here’s your accordion.”

Imagine if you would that you have been selected to be part of a NASA team preparing for a five-year Mission to Mars. After an extensive time of training with your team the launch date finally arrives.

Then, seated on your spaceship and as the rocket lift off one of your fellow astronauts turns to you and says “What do you know about Mars?”

Imagine shrugging your shoulders and saying nothing. You know we really never talked much about Mars. I guess we’ll just find out when we get there.

Unthinkable and yet when it comes to our ultimate destination, the place where you and I as followers of Jesus Christ will spend eternity, we are largely biblically illiterate when it comes to heaven.

Oh sure, we have seen movies, we have sung about heaven, and there are plenty of novels out there describing someone’s near death experience and what they saw thinking it was heaven.

But my question is, what does the Bible actually say about heaven?

Over the next few weeks we are going to be searching Scripture to learn what God’s word has to say.

After all, God is the real authority on the subject. Amen?

This morning is intended to be an introduction on the subject as we take a quick overview of “What We Know about Heaven”.

Revelation 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 the sea was no more. 2 And I 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 the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.**

**4 He 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.”**

**We know that Heaven is a real physical place**

As human beings whom God made to be both physical and spiritual, we are not designed to live in a non-physical realm – indeed we are incapable of even conceiving of such a place (or non-place).

The Bible is filled with references from both Testaments that offer real, concrete, understandable teachings of heaven and the new earth.

The Bible speaks of heaven as (1) a garden, (2) a city, and (3) a kingdom. These are familiar terms to us.

We know what a garden is, we have been to a city, and we know about kingdoms.

Did God inspire the use of these terms because they were the best He could come up with at the time, or are they true, real, physical aspects of the new heaven and the new earth?

Are they actual descriptions of what awaits us? I believe they are.

Listen, God made us and knows we cannot anticipate or long for that which we cannot conceive of, or imagine.

I believe that is why God gave us glimpses of heaven, real visions, to fire up our imaginations and stoke our anticipation and longing.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 “**But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God**.

It is obvious in the context that God HAS revealed some things about heaven that He desperately wants us to know and embrace.

True, God has reserved most of His truths about heaven for the time our resurrected minds can conceive of them.

But let us not give up on learning what God HAS revealed and DOES want us to know.

When the apostle John was caught up into heaven, God commanded him to write about his prolonged visit to heaven in the book of Revelation.

Almost ALL that book is about heaven, and John was commanded to write it down and explain to us all he saw and heard.

Yes we ARE to talk much about heaven, to learn all we can, to sanctify our imaginations in Scripture and Holy Spirit’s anointing, and then share all we find about our eternal home.

How can we, as Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1, “**set our hearts on things above**” if we don’t do this?

To long for Christ is to long for heaven, for that is the place where we will be with Him. We are to “**long for a better country**” according to Hebrews 11:16 where righteousness dwells.

How can we fulfill those commands if we have no clear idea what heaven is all about?

C. S. Lewis observes, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were those who thought the most of the next.

All those who left their most powerful mark on heart had their minds occupied with heaven.

It is since Christianity has largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’ for good measure. Aim at earth and you will get neither.”

So, what I am asking you to do through this series is to reason with me from the bedrock of God’s revealed truth, His Word.

Then seek the Holy Spirit to sanctify your imaginations as we envision what He shows us.

God has revealed much in His Word to fuel our imagination and know much about heaven. But even the most spirit-led, brilliant imaginations pale before the reality that God has planned for us.

What we know about heave is that heaven is a real place and God tells us much about it in His Word. And…

**You can know that heaven is your final home**

Ancient cities once kept rolls of their citizens. Guards were posted at the city gates to keep out criminals and enemies by checking their names against the list, the roll.

This is the context for Revelation 21:27 “**But nothing unclean will ever enter it** [that is heaven]**, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who**’s name **are written in the Lamb’s book of life**.

Your entrance into the new heaven and the new earth will depend on your name being recorded on the roll.

Randy Alcorn tells of an episode in the life of Ruthanna Metzgar, a professional singer who had been asked to sing at the wedding of a very wealthy man.

According to the invitation, the reception would be held on the top two floors of Seattle’s Columbia Tower.

She and her husband, Roy, were excited about attending. They knew the tuxedoed waiters would serve the very best hors d’oeuvres and the menu would make the society page.

As they arrived for the reception, the maître d’ asked, “May I have your name, please.”

She gave her name and he looked at the guest list. Not finding it, he asked her to spell the name. “I’m sorry, but your name is not here.”

“I am the singer at the wedding. I am expected to sing at the reception as well. I must be allowed in!” she replied.

To which the maître d’ replied, “It doesn’t matter what you did or what you plan to do. If your name does not appear on the list, you cannot attend the banquet.”

With that he motioned to man standing nearby, “Please escort these people to the service elevator.”

After returning to their car they drove in silence for several miles. Finally Roy asked, “What just happened?”

Ruthanna replied, “When the invitation arrived, I was busy and didn’t give it much thought. I never bothered to RSVP. Besides, I was the singer. I was certain I would be allowed in to sing at the reception.”

She started to weep, not simply because she would not enjoy the evening with her husband, the food, or the publicity, but because she suddenly understood what it would be like to stand before the gates of heaven and not have her name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Throughout the ages people have been too busy to respond to Christ’s invitation to grace and love.

They have not replied to His call for salvation and service, and so they will not be at his Wedding Banquet in heaven.

But, that is not His plan. Jesus wants us all to be there. God the Father doesn’t want any to miss heaven.

He wants us all to be saved and be with Him forever and ever in the most glorious place we could imagine.

In 2 Peter 3:9 (NLT) we read this; “**The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.**”

God’s will is for all mankind to respond in faith to His provision of salvation, and receive the hope of heaven.

Can you know for certain that heaven will be your home, that salvation is yours forever and ever?

Absolutely you can!

John writes 1 John 5:13 “**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life**.”

The Message paraphrase put it this way: “**My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God’s Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion**.”

The Amplified Bible adds, “**so that you may know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that you [already] have life, yes, eternal life**.”

Last year Paul, Bryan, Dan and I went to Huston TX for a mission trip.

(By the way Paul will be leading another team the first week of October. If you’re interested in going see Paul.)

But when the four of went to Huston last year we didn’t just hit the road in the hopes that we would will somehow get there.

No. We had a definite destination in mind. We checked out the rout on MapQuest, and we did this in advance.

We calculated the length of the trip, the mileage and the cost, what time we needed to leave in order to get there at the right time.

If you want to get somewhere, guesswork is a poor strategy.

The goal of getting to heaven is worthy of greater advanced planning than we would give to any other journey, yet some people spend far more time preparing for a trip to Disneyland than heaven.

Do you know what you need to do to insure that your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life?

I want you to know that you know that you know.

I want you more certain of your eternal destiny than you are that you are breathing right now. You can.

And I join the Father in desiring nothing greater for you than entrance into His eternal Kingdom.

This is where it starts. Without this knowledge and assurance, all the study about heaven will be empty and worthless to you.

I invite you, before you leave this place, to get with me, or one of the elders, or someone you trust and settle this matter for all time and eternity. You will be so glad you did.

[Present gospel]

**Benediction: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**