

4-23-23

Sermon- Behold Something is Going On!

Scripture- Revelation 21:1-6 CTW: Psalm 148

Hymns- 650, 652, 658

Theme- God's promises, do we really accept what He has in store for us? I've decided to preach on the subject of heaven today. And I hope that it leaves you with a feeling about what God has done for us, & what we have to look forward to as Christians, when finally one day we're with the Lord for all eternity. So my subject is "heaven." But at the same time, I know that I'm going to fall short because words are just not adequate to describe what God has prepared.

I. Intro: We are Talking about the subject of heaven today.

My prayer is that it leaves you with a feeling about what God has done for us, & what we have to look forward to as Christians, when finally one day we're with the Lord for all eternity.

A. First understand that words are just not adequate to describe what God has prepared. In fact, the apostle Paul expressed this same idea when he wrote, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" **1 Corinthians 2:9.**

The apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, valiantly tries to describe the indescribable & express the inexpressible in the 21st chapter of the Book of Revelation where he talks about the new heavens & the new earth, about gates of pearl & streets of gold. But even he falls short in his ability to picture heaven's glory & wonder.

ILL. By the way, that reminds me of a story about a wealthy Christian who begged God to let him bring one suitcase of

valuables with him to heaven. God relented, so the man filled a big suitcase with gold bars and drug it with him. When Saint Peter saw what was in it, he said "why would you go to the trouble to bring paving blocks with you to heaven?"

Values in heaven are different, aren't they? Those things we consider so valuable here aren't going to be valuable in heaven at all. That is why we really can't grasp the true meaning of heaven.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class of children, "Tell me what you think heaven will be like." She got all kinds of answers, but I especially like this one from a third grade boy who said, "Heaven is going to be the happiest part of my dead life."

II. Heaven- the subject itself offers great challenges because we're a different culture. We are perhaps different than any other culture that has graced the pages of history.

If you'll look back & study the civilizations of the past, you'll discover that virtually every culture has been concerned about the afterlife, about what happens to you after you die.

The ancient Egyptians spent years building pyramids, using hundreds of thousands of laborers. They buried their loved ones in these pyramids, with abundant supplies of food, clothing, & other valuable articles buried with them - all because they believed in life after death.

It doesn't seem to make any difference what culture you study. It has always been true, that is, until today.

A. We're probably the first culture in history that seems to be more concerned with "here & now" than the future.
"I want it all. I want it now. Grab for all the gusto you can get. He who has the most toys when he dies, wins."

This attitude can even affect the church. When we come to church, we expect the preacher to give us something that will help us today. "I want to know how to solve my problems today, to heal my heart aches today." "I want to know how to deal with issues in my life affecting me today."

Well, we ought to be concerned about today. We ought to be concerned about the issues & how they affect our lives. Remember, it was Jesus who came that we "might have life, & that we might have it in abundance."

B. But there is more to life than that. The Bible teaches that what we do today is extremely important because it determines where we will be tomorrow.

Jesus asks, "If you gain the whole world & lose your soul, what profit is there in that?"

So if we're focusing all our efforts on gaining the world, but in the process of getting it, we lose our soul, we've lost everything.

Bill Hybels says that among his earliest memories of church was being in a children's choir. They dressed up in robes, & stood on risers, & practiced a lot. And he says that as a child he hated almost every minute of it. He hated putting that robe on, & he hated having to stand still for so long.

To make matters even worse, the Choir director told him, 'If you don't like singing in the choir, you're not going to enjoy heaven.' So as a child, Bill thought of heaven as putting on a choir robe & standing on a riser & singing for all eternity. So he wasn't really all that excited about going to heaven.

Maybe some of you feel the same way. Maybe some of your

images are mixed up, & you're not sure what to expect of heaven, either. So what is heaven really going to be like?

C. You can approach the subject of heaven from many different angles. I could talk about the physical portrayals of heaven, about streets of gold, & gates of pearl, about jasper walls, & the river of life, & the great white throne.

But John, in **Revelation 21**, talks more about relationships. And that's the part that I want us to look at this morning.

It makes sense, doesn't it? If the relationship we have with God is a real close personal relationship that spills out & causes us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, isn't that what our God wants? Isn't that why the Bible talks about us as a family, the family of God, & each one of us as sons & daughters of God?

And if we're a part of one great family of God, then it only stands to reason that heaven is going to be an extension of the relationship that is already started on earth. So I want you to understand why it is that John speaks of heaven as a place of relationships.

III. Think about heaven as a place with a new relationship.

A. First of all, John speaks of heaven as a place where there is a new relationship. Listen again to his words, "I saw a new heaven & a new earth, for the first heaven & the first earth had passed away, & there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God..."

And in vs. 5 he says, "He who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new!'"

You see, our relationship in heaven is going to be completely

different from any relationship we've experienced on earth. It is going to be a brand-new relationship. All of the relationships here on earth are imperfect. But heaven will be perfect.

1. For example, we're going to live in a new place.

Listen to what the writer says in **Hebrews 11:10**. He's talking about Abraham, & he says, "He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect & builder is God."

We're going to live in a city designed & built by God. Now, I don't know about you, but that is exciting to me. And what this passage says is that we're going to have a new home in a new city, with a new heaven & a new earth. It's all going to be brand new.

2. We're also going to live a completely new way of life. We'll never have to worry about locking our doors, or about children being abused, or about crime in our neighborhood. It will be a community beyond our wildest dreams & imaginations - a place of peace that passes all understanding.

3. We'll receive comfort there, too. John says that God will wipe away all our tears. All the tears & sorrow & pain we've experienced as we traveled this dusty road of life will finally be gone. The hurts will be mended. The broken hearts will be whole. And God will be with us & be our Comforter.

B. The second relationship is an intimate relationship

Listen to what John says in the last part of **vs. 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.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, `Now the dwelling of God is with men, & He will live with them. They will be

His people, & God himself will be with them & be their God."

You understand that in the book of Revelation, John deliberately uses symbolic language because he is having to find words to describe something that we don't have human words to describe.

So when he tries to describe the relationship that we're going to have with God in heaven, the closest thing he can come up with is to compare it to a wedding.

Now think about this **wedding pictured in Revelation 21**. How much preparation has gone into it? The Bible says that since before the foundation of the world, God has been preparing for this wedding.

And the Bible goes on to tell us that when we stand before God, when the church becomes the bride of Christ, we will be dressed in white robes.

It's symbolic. And what it symbolizes is purity. When finally we stand beside Jesus, our bridegroom, & we're united with Him as the church, His bride, we will be pure. Our sins will have been forgiven & forgotten & gone forever. Because of His love, we'll stand before Him pure in His sight.

C. There is an individual relationship

In **vs's 6 & 7** John says this: "He said to me: `It is done. I am the Alpha & the Omega, the Beginning & the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. (Remember Jesus' promise to the Samaritan woman at the well... He who overcomes will inherit all this, & I will be his God & he will be my son."

Notice the promises in these verses. God has made some

wonderful promises about what will happen when we finally get to heaven.

1. First of all, we'll never have to be concerned about our salvation again. Nobody, nothing, can take that away from us. We're secure in the Lord, & He gives us freely from the water of life. We'll drink from it, & it doesn't cost us anything.

We're not used to that. We're used to working & paying our bills & making it on our own & feeling like we've earned it & we deserve it.

But there we won't earn it, & we won't deserve it. But it will be ours as a gift. We have to accept the gift, obviously, before it becomes ours. But it is a free gift from a God who loves us.

2. Secondly, there is strength there. Listen to what He says in **vs. 7**, "He who overcomes will inherit all this..." We'll be overcomers because we'll have overcome the problems, the temptations, the sins, & the difficulties that we have faced here. How will we have overcome those things? We'll have overcome them because of the strength given to us by a faithful, holy God. And throughout eternity we'll be overcomers in His sight.

3. Finally, there's the special promise of son-ship. He says, "I will be his God & he will be my son." Only God can accomplish that. Each one of us will have an individual personal relationship with God.

When you look at it this way, our presence here, as we meet together, ought to be a foretaste of heaven. Singing, praising God, & loving each other. You come into the room & you see someone who's downcast, & you say something that builds them up. We bear each other's burdens & become overcomers together. That's what the church ought to be. **Amen? Let us pray...**