

## 52. Heaven, Revelation 21:1-3

“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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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.’”

**Question:** What will heaven be like?

**Trajectory Verses:** Philippians 3:21; John 14:2; Revelation 22:20

News flash: We’re not going to heaven. According to Revelation 21:1-3, we’re going to the New Jerusalem on the new earth. That’s actually good news. After all, the typical portrait of heaven is a bit bland. Do you really want to dress in all white for all eternity? Do you really want to sing songs ... over and over and over ... FOREVER ... accompanied by a harp?! To me that seems like the other place.

The portrait of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 tells of a city on a physical earth. We go there in a resurrected body, still physical, but without the limitations of aging, illness, or aches (1 Cor 15:35-49). According to Philippians 3:21, our resurrected body will be like Jesus’ resurrected body. In his new body he walked through walls and defied gravity. The possible implications are extraordinary. Imagine it, Eden restored with perfected bodies. There will be agriculture and architecture, culture and art, plants, animals, camping, rivers, homes and entertainment and all without sin. That’s what the New Earth will be like! Imagine how technologically advanced we would be if we were not distracted with war, medicine, police protection, and government. We may well have technological advancements in the New Jerusalem that far exceed what we have or even imagine here. God is not opposed to our curiosity or creativity; he gave us both. As Solomon said, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Prov 25:2). Just think of it, an eternal game of hide and go seek with God. Our eternal praise will not be merely singing but producing new acts of art, work, accomplishments, and learning. Jesus, in fact, is preparing that place for us as we speak, “I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). So what will the new Jerusalem be like? Revelation describes it both in terms of what isn’t there and in terms of what is there.

### What Isn’t There

In the New Jerusalem there will be no unemployment, picket lines, police, politicians, doctors, lawyers (no kidding!), preachers (really!), prisons, hospitals, IRS, INS, CIA, FBI, mothballs, locks, Kleenex, light bulbs, weddings, funerals, or armies, just to name a few. The last two chapters of Revelation get even more specific. (1) There will no longer be any sea (21:1). Earlier in the book “many waters” was used to describe many peoples, tongues and languages. In other words, seas separate people. They hindered the wealth of commerce and the wonders of other cultures. In the New Earth there will be no separation of nations, peoples,

tongue, or tribes. While there will be diversity, there will be no division, no racism, nor nationalism. (2) There will be no tears or death, no crying or pain (Rev 21:4). No cancer is allowed. No funerals, divorces, murders, thefts, gossip, broken dreams, unresolved anger, haunting memories, or lifelong regrets. (3) We will not go to church because we won't need to (Rev 21:22). We will dwell eternally in God's presence. We won't have to chase after him through priests or programs. No more "daily devotions" or sermon series. All of those shadows will be consumed in the reality of his presence. (4) There is no more sun or moon (Rev 21:23). God himself will provide all the light we need. (5) Nothing impure will enter the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:27). Including me? Yes! You will be in heaven but you will no longer have any impurity or sin.

That sounds like a fairytale! The reality is that Jesus' work of redemption will be fully complete with our physical transformation. Finally, the impulses of our new bodies will match the intentions of our saved soul. Consider this: Those things that cause me to sin now will not be present in heaven. First, Satan and his cronies don't get a guest pass. Therefore, they can no longer put ideas in my mind and opportunities in my path. Granted, I'm perfectly capable of sinning all by myself. But God's enemies prod me along. Without them, I'll be a lot closer to perfection. Second, I won't live in a society where sin prevails and is promoted. There will be no lewd billboards or aggressive drivers with fingers flying out their windows. There are no red-light districts or adult bookstores, no materialistic malls or Hollywood productions to promote sensual senses. Because my environment will be purified and my mind transformed, I will come pretty close to perfection. Third, there will be no marriage or giving in marriage. The Bible does not say that we will be asexual in heaven. But the nature of our sexuality will be transformed. Sexuality is a God-given gift and it is good. Yet who could deny that it is one of the primary means by which Satan leads people astray? Without my present passions I will come a lot closer to sinlessness. Fourth, there will be no competition in heaven. So my need to best others will be obliterated. Because we will dwell perpetually in the presence of God, our thoughts will be higher, our motives nobler, our spirits humbler.

There is one last thing. It is time. Often we prioritize projects rather than people. We listen poorly and work haphazardly because we are pressed by a clock. In eternity what's the rush? We will always have time to listen to a child's story, to hold a loved one's hand, to sit quietly and watch the world. There will be no deadlines to meet, no traffic jams to beat, no lines to rush to the front of. It sounds too good to be true. Nevertheless, the New Jerusalem will lack everything that hinders us from full righteousness. Hence, we can be sinless.

(6) There will be no curse (Rev 22:3). For both men and women this means there is no more death. For men it also means that we won't earn a living by the sweat of our brow. For women, there will be no more pain in childbirth. There is something else. God told Eve that she would "desire" her husband but that he would rule over her. We read the word "desire" as a good thing. We picture a woman in an evening gown with a candlelight dinner waiting for her man when he comes through the front door. Wrong picture! This particular word translated "desire" is only used twice in the Old Testament. It is found in the curse passage just referenced (Gen 3:16). Then in the very next chapter (Gen 4:7), God says to Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you." So we picture a woman crouched behind the door with curlers, barbed wire, and a rolling pin, desiring to bludgeon her man as he walks through the door. This tension between the sexes is part of the curse. Fortunately, it is largely alleviated in Jesus Christ

(cf. Gal 3:28) though never eliminated until eternity. There are still differences in men's and women's roles in the church. Realistically, Christian women still struggle with this desire to dominate and, sadly, mostly lose in unfortunate ways. It is still primarily women who get lower paying jobs, who get raped, who are beaten by husbands, who are saddled with domestic responsibilities which they often bear alone. It's not right, but the reality is they often just can't win. That's due in part to the ancient curse they are under. In heaven, however, all this will change. There will be no more competition, fighting, or suffering. God will put an end to the inequity between the sexes.

### **What Will Be There**

Heaven will be a wonderful place for all that isn't there. However, our hearts yearn for heaven because of what is there. There will be saints of old in heaven: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Peter, James, and John. Oh, the conversations we will have! Moreover, there are many loved ones there. Wives will be reunited with husbands and children with parents. Granted, the nature of their relationship will change, but how sweet it still will be. Fathers will see children who died in their cribs. Grandparents will introduce themselves to grandchildren who only knew them through stories. As sweet as this reunion will be, however, that's not why we want to go there.

There will be wealth that is unimaginable. John describes the city of vast proportions with stunning wealth (Rev 21:18-21). Even the asphalt is twenty-four karat gold! The angelic choirs will be ... well, heavenly! The new earth will surely put this one to shame (and God didn't do half bad here!). None will lack for food. Everyone is a prince and princess in the kingdom of God. We all dream of such luxury and comfort. However, that's not why we want to go there.

We will have new bodies. No more arthritis, no more physical limitations, no more looking in the mirror and asking "Why?" We will have energy to work and play, time to rest and worship. As wonderful as this sounds, this is not why we want to go there. We want to go there because he is there. *He is there*. The one we have talked about, sung to, read of, and written for. He is waiting with outstretched arms and these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your reward." Yet I can't help but think that one glimpse of his person will make all of our words irrelevant. He is so much grander than we have described, much more glorious than we have imagined. Our impulse will not be to embrace him as a buddy but to fall down at his feet awestruck and overwhelmed in the majesty of the moment. I suspect that it will only be his immense love that draws us to our feet to receive his embrace.

Heaven is better than you think, and it is sooner than you think. Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming soon!" (Rev 22:7). "The time is near" (Rev 22:10). "Behold, I am coming soon!" (Rev 22:12). "Yes, I am coming soon" (Rev 22:20). His impassioned plea is that we come to him. "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." Here, then, is the most amazing truth of all eternity: God loves you. In fact, he doesn't just love you; he really, really likes you. He invites you to him because he craves your presence (Rev 21:3). So what can we say in reply to the God of the universe who invites us to come? Here's the biblical script, "'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

### **Key Points:**

- We are not going to heaven but to the New Jerusalem on the New Earth in a physical yet glorified body.
- This New Earth will NOT have sickness, death, division, decay, or anything that could bring tears to our eyes.
- This New Jerusalem will have all sorts of comfort and beauty but mostly Jesus, in person and present for eternity.

**Action Step:** Ask someone you have a relationship with to describe to you what they think heaven will be like. If appropriate, ask them if they have confidence they are going there.

**Further Resource:** Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (2004).

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. When you think of heaven, what images come to mind? What will it be like?
2. What is one thing you are most looking forward to not having in heaven?
3. What are some things you've always wanted to do on earth that you think you might have time for in heaven?
4. If you knew you were going to heaven next week, what would you do differently this week?