

New Heaven, New Earth – Revelation 21

I want you to use your imagination with me for a few minutes and I want you to picture this meal. You sit down to dinner, hungry as you can be, and on the big plate in front of you is a wonderful, healthy combination of raw cabbage, raw broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower. How's that look? To me it looks like I'm going hungry tonight but maybe you like raw veggies. Good for you. But then, before you can even decide whether you are going to eat those veggies or not, there is placed in front of you a big plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies. They are hot out of the oven. The chocolate is melting. The smell is mouth-watering. And they are incredible! Now, imagine that nobody else is around. Nobody will see. Nobody will ever know. What happens next? If you are anything like me, those cookies are history. I will eat those until I'm sick. I may just stick my head down in them and eat them like an animal. I might roll around in 'em, just eating and rolling and loving life.

I would have a hard time eating those vegetables if chocolate chip cookies were sitting there. I don't know if I could do it. Well, I think Heaven is sort of that way. If we knew everything there is to know about Heaven, I think we would have a hard time concentrating on what we are supposed to do here in this life for thinking about what the next life had in store. Also, I'm pretty sure chocolate chip cookies will be in Heaven but that's not the point. There are lots of things we don't know about Heaven but I believe God gives us enough to keep us motivated to do what needs to be done here but also to look forward to what lies in store for us as believers when we get there. I have to admit I was encouraged a while back when I read a sermon by the late, great W.A. Criswell who said, and I quote, "*Preaching on Heaven is hard.*" That made me feel a little bit better. I feel the same way and that's probably all that great expositor and I have in common when it comes to preaching.

It's hard to preach on Heaven because there is a lot we don't know and some of what we do know is to be taken literally and some of it is symbolic. Timing is also an issue. Great theologians will argue over what happens when and what comes next and what happens after that. Sometimes finding application for a sermon on Heaven can be difficult if you just lay out a bunch of facts but even though it can be difficult, I believe it is important. Yes, I'm curious, as you probably are, about what Heaven is going to be like. But we are told that all scripture is God-breathed and is useful. (2 Tim. 3:16) We are told to set our minds on things above. (Colossians 3:2) We are told to store up treasure in Heaven (Matt. 6) so we have to prepare for it. Putting on our helmet of salvation means, in part, meditating on our eternal home in Heaven. So we should at least know a little bit about this place where we are told to think about and prepare for.

We have talked about the rapture and how that could happen at any minute. We know the Second Coming happens next and that it will be quite the spectacle. The Millennium is going to start after that and will last how long? That's pretty easy. 1000 years. Then finally we get our first glimpse of Heaven as we will know it. So, turn to the **Book of the Revelation**; the last book of the Bible, and let's read **chapter 21, verses 1-5**. The Apostle John wrote this book on the Isle of Patmos where he was exiled for preaching the Gospel. Little did the authorities who put him there know that this is right where God wanted John so God could reveal some incredible things to him; things that have blessed and encouraged every generation since.

We saw in the previous chapter last week about the Millennium – the period after the Rapture and after the Second Coming of Jesus where we, as believers in Jesus, will reign and serve and live with Jesus on this earth as we know it but without the presence or influence of Satan. Jesus called it a time of refreshing and it will last a literal 1,000 years and it will be wonderful and great as we live in our glorified bodies. After that thousand years, Satan will be set free but quickly thrown into the lake of burning sulfur and all of us will then go up to Heaven and live with God

for eternity in Heaven. Right? Well...not exactly. Let's read **Revelation 21:1-5** and we will see exactly what happens. *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. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell 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." 5He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

Poor John! Can you imagine Jesus telling you to "Write this down!" I'd be a nervous wreck. That would be just the time my pencil lead would break or my pen would run out of ink. "Excuse me, Gabriel. Can I borrow a pen?" How embarrassing. Anyway, hey, let me ask you a question. Are you tired of this life and this world yet? Especially after reading that passage, are you still in love with this nasty, old world and the problems caused by sin in this world? Maybe you are young and in the prime of your life and this world still looks fun and exciting to you. Well, enjoy your youth because it won't last long. Enjoy that flat stomach and that wavy hair. Enjoy good sleep and the ability to work hard and play hard. As some of us with a few years under our belts know, it's not going to last forever.

These bodies, these relationships, these minds – they are all meant to wear out. Yes, youth is wasted on the young but getting old stinks for a reason. God created us with a longing for something more than this earth can provide and that longing grows stronger as our bodies grow weaker. The older I get, the readier I am and the readier I want to be for eternity in Heaven. The older I get and the more I study it, the more real Heaven becomes and the more I want to store up treasure there. When we are young everything seems to take so long to happen but as we get older we look back and it seems like just yesterday that we were young. How many of you know what I mean? I remember when I was a kid and I would hear my dad make that grunting noise when he bent over to pick something up. You know the sound. I wondered why he did that. Then I remember the first time I heard myself do it. Oh no. I'm old. Old age is not for sissies, that's for sure. But we have been given in this passage something incredible to look forward to and after studying it carefully, I am surprised, excited and encouraged by what I read. Maybe you will be too. In fact, the first sentence has two ideas that may surprise you. Look at **verse 1** again. 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.

"A new heaven and a new earth." What does that mean? Well, we know from several other passages that this earth as we know it will be destroyed. In **Luke 21:33** Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." **2 Peter 3:10** says, "But the day of the LORD will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." The psalmist says in **Psalms 102** that the earth's foundations will be discarded like clothing. Now, this could get really complicated. Whole sermons have been preached on this and complete books written about how earth will be destroyed but not completely and how "forever" doesn't always mean forever. But here is my simple explanation of it. In Genesis, God used water to destroy the earth and everything on it except Noah and his family, right? Well, similarly, after Satan is done away with, God will destroy the earth again, only this time with fire.

John Piper argues that God did not create matter to throw it away. He writes, "When Revelation 21:1 and 2 Peter 3:10 say that the present earth and heavens will pass away, it does not mean that they go out of existence, but may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away." (Heaven – Randy Alcorn, page 152) Then he compares them to a caterpillar and a butterfly. The old is destroyed and the new emerges. Think of it this way. We will live in glorified bodies on a glorified earth in a glorified Heaven. My point here

is that so many people think of our eternal home in Heaven as being “up there” where God is now but really, Heaven will come down from “up there” and will forever be on this earth. For most of us, I don’t think it will ultimately matter, but it’s good to see the truth.

The other thing interesting about this verse is that it says there will no longer be any sea. How many of you are like me and are bummed out about that? I love the water. I love being at the ocean or on the lake. Well, I have what I believe is good news about this. I have read literally dozens of commentaries about this because I wanted to know the truth. I know this bothers people every time we read it and while I know we aren’t going to be disappointed with Heaven, there is something about this that bothers people. I completely understand. Now, this verse plainly says that there will no longer be any sea and I will always err on the side of taking the Bible literally BUT first we have to take it in context. For John and everybody else in those days, the sea or the oceans were places of terror and separation. They didn’t have compasses and if it was cloudy or they lost sight of land, they were lost.

They didn’t have scuba gear and all they knew about ocean creatures was what came up in their nets when they were fishing. If you have ever been deep sea fishing or if you ever watched those Jacques Cousteau specials, you know that some of that stuff is just plain scary. So, when they thought of the sea, they thought of cold, treacherous waters that separate nations, destroy ships and drowned loved ones in poisonous waters.

But also, we know that in other places like **Isaiah 60**, speaking of the New Jerusalem, it says, *“the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.”* (Verse 5) Then it says, *“Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God.”* (Verse 9)

Even if there are no more oceans and no more sea, we do know that there will be plenty of other water. **Revelation 22** tells of a great river that flows right through the capital city and flowing rivers go somewhere. If not oceans, then large lakes, so, don’t worry. If fishing and boating and snorkeling are part of your idea of what Heaven will include, I think you’ll be very happy.

Now, let’s get to something with a little more meat on it, if you will. While it is going to be great to go fishing or swimming or boating on this new earth that we are going to be on for eternity, and while we hope that Heaven will have dogs and Mexican food and we can’t wait to see old Aunt Bessie again, I want to skip to **verse 3** and let’s look at something that will fulfill all of our wants, needs and desires in Heaven.

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” Let’s stop right there for a while. What does it mean for God to dwell among the people? Is that any different than it is right now? Isn’t God everywhere and the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts?

Let me ask you something. How do you know God exists? Have you ever seen Him with your eyes? Have you ever heard His voice audibly with your ears? Have you ever touched Him with your fingers or even smelled Him with your nose? No. We only know that God exists because the Bible tells us and it has been proven to be true and we sense His presence with us and feel His guiding hand through the Holy Spirit that does live inside of us.

But John continually says, *“I saw...”* over and over again and so will we. We will see God. We will be with God; touching Him and knowing Him and spending time with Him and THAT is what makes Heaven heavenly. I’m not just trying to be spiritual here either. God is the Creator of all things including the Creator of our wants, needs and desires so it only makes sense that He will be the one to satisfy those as well.

Since the beginning, man has wanted to see God. In **Exodus 33**, Moses asks and is allowed to see the back side of God. Job said, *“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. 26And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27I myself will see him with my own eyes I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* (Job 19:25-27)

The psalmist says in **Psalms 63:1**, *“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”* We may think we want lots of things but our real desire, our God-given desire is found only in God Himself. That’s why acquiring stuff in this world never satisfies. You can never get enough money or fame or power or anything else. None of that will truly satisfy.

Our longing for Heaven is a longing for God. (Heaven – Randy Alcorn, page 171) Being with God is what is what gives us satisfaction in this life. Think how much more satisfied we will be when *“God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

In **Psalms 27:4** David says, *“One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.”* Asaph understood when he wrote in **Psalms 73:25**, *“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”*

Father J. Boudreau wrote something along these lines, *“When we see the face of God we will become beautiful with His beauty, rich with His wealth, holy with His holiness and happy with His unutterable happiness.”*

I can’t wait to get there like I can’t wait to eat more cookies. Phooey on this life like phooey on raw vegetables. I can’t wait to go swimming and running and riding motorcycles on golden streets and seeing my loved ones and having a perfect body but even all of that won’t satisfy forever if the One who provides it isn’t there.

As some of you know, I have a problem with most of these books and movies written by people who have supposedly died and gone to Heaven and came back to earth. Because the focus of them always seems to be on seeing Uncle Jake or how beautiful the sky is or having their body healed. When John saw Jesus in Heaven in **Revelation 1:17** it says he *“fell at His feet as though dead.”*

Paul heard Jesus speak on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and just hearing His voice made Paul fall down, go blind and nearly killed him for three days. The problem is, as it says in **Hebrews 12:14**, *“without holiness no one will see the LORD.”* But we don’t get to Heaven on our holiness, do we? **1 Corinthians 1:30** says, *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”* **Philippians 3:9** says, *“the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”* We ought to wake up every morning and go to sleep every night thanking God that one day, maybe today, but someday soon, we will see God face to face not because of anything we have done or ever will do but only because of what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross to pay for our sins and all we have to do is have faith in Him. Is that a good description of you? Do you have faith? Oh sure. Everybody has faith, right? But the proof of faith is a changed life. The proof of repentance is a changed life. The proof of thankfulness is a changed life and if that does not describe you, then I need to talk and pray with you right now as the music plays.