

The Glory of Heaven – Rev. 21

All my early driving life I drove pickup trucks, usually the louder and faster the truck the better. So, you can imagine the pain I felt when I got a new job that I knew would require a lot of driving and I had to trade my ¾ ton Chevy Crew Cab with a 454 and dual exhaust for a...Volkswagen Jetta...with a 2-liter engine. It was tiny and it made no noise and had no power but it got 30-something miles to the gallon so I drove it and hoped I wouldn't see anybody I knew when I was in it.

It was so embarrassing. I remember being stopped at a red light and a girl I used to date pulled up next to me and looked down from her pickup over at me and just kind of smiled with this “*I'm so sorry*” smile. It was awful.

I remember hearing a sermon about that time and the preacher was talking about glory and he said that the name “Ichabod” meant “no glory” so I named that little car “Ichabod” for that reason. There was no glory while driving that little thing. Nobody ever looked over and gave a thumbs-up and said, “*Nice practical car!*” That never happened. “*Good gas mileage rocks, dude!*” No, people don't say that.

You don't paint flames on the side of a Jetta. You don't put Edelbrock carburetor stickers on the window. You don't rev the engine at a red light to challenge the guy next to you. There is no glory in a Jetta and I think if we are honest, most of us like a little bit of glory every now and then. Right? We like to think we have something nice or different or fun that other people might appreciate.

I know, I know. You're way too spiritual to want any glory but I do. Is that shocking for me to say? Would it surprise you to know that even the modest and humble servant of God, the Apostle Paul felt the same way? Did you know he looked forward to glory? In **Romans 8:17**, he says, “¹⁷*Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*”

That's big talk, isn't it? How dare Paul say he wanted to share glory with Jesus? Is that blasphemy? No, that's what Jesus wants for us as well. In **John 17**, Jesus is praying to the Father and asks Him to give us, His disciples, His glory. According to that verse in Romans, we share in the sufferings of Christ now and will share in the glory of Christ later as His “co-heirs” in Heaven.

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But what does that really mean? What will that look like? What will Heaven look like? Just how glorious will it really be? Well, let's look at the ultimate passage for finding out about the glory of Heaven. Turn to **Revelation**, the last book of the Bible, and let's look at chapter 21, verse 9, through chapter 22, verse 5. **Revelation 21:9-22:5.**

We have been talking about the end times and have come to see what Heaven is going to be like. So far, we have seen that with God, the Creator and Designer, there all our wants, needs and desires will be fulfilled in Heaven. We have seen that there will be no more crying, mourning and pain in Heaven and what that really means for us. Today we have a fairly long passage that describes what Heaven is going to be like in greater detail. We pick up where we left off last week with the author, John, being given the grand tour of Heaven by an angel.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.¹⁷ The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick.¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

That's a lot to take in, I know. Can you imagine what it must have been like for John? He is shown something no one has ever seen before; something so unimaginably beautiful and indescribable and he is told, "Now, write down what you see."

Look at **verses 10-11** again. He "showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God." When Jesus said in **John 14:3** that He was going to prepare a place for us, this is it. This is the capital city of Heaven. It's not all of Heaven, just the capital, where we will live with God and He will live with us. As I understand it, we will be able to travel all over the new earth but this is the place to be, the New Jerusalem.

Now, it says it shone with the glory of God. What does that mean? What is the glory of God? We talk about it a lot. We sing songs about it. It is referred to in the Old and New Testaments. We talk about doing things for our own glory in a negative sense but God does things for His glory and that's good. But what is God's glory?

Well, I did some research – I googled it – and this is what I found. God's glory is the beauty of His spirit. So, there ya go. Hope that helps. Try not to cry as you meditate on that. 😊 But I need more than that. I'm not smart enough to get anything out of that. So, I kept looking and let me share some of what I found.

When we talk about God's glory, there is literally nothing that we are or know or have or can imagine that is not included in God's glory. The Bible talks a lot about it. In Exodus, it says that God's glory went ahead of the Hebrew people in fire and cloud as they crossed the desert. Moses saw the glory of God and his face glowed so bright he had to wear a veil. All through the Old Testament His glory filled the temple.

In the New Testament, His glory was seen by the shepherds at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2) and at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt. 17). The resurrection and ascension of Jesus both manifest God's glory. **1 Corinthians 11:7** says man is the glory of God and **Isaiah 43:7** says man was created for God's glory. When someone dies, we sometimes say they have gone to glory, speaking of Heaven and that's correct. Asaph said the same thing in **Psalms 73**.

Everything was created by God so everything is for God's glory. Why has God ever done anything? Why does God do anything even now? The answer is He does it for His glory. If everything I did, I did for my glory, I wouldn't have any friends. Everybody would hate me. But when God does something for His glory, He deserves it and it's good for everybody.

The problem we have understanding that is that our finite brains cannot understand infinity. How long or how far is infinity? We can't understand that completely. But God is infinitely powerful, infinitely loving, infinitely knowing. He is everywhere all the time and always willing to forgive if seriously asked. That kind of infinity is impossible for us to truly relate to but through faith we know it's true.

In this life, sometimes God allows things to happen to us that are difficult to understand and difficult to get through but, in the end, if we are obedient, it is for our good and for His glory. BUT...in the next world; in Heaven, everything will be for His glory and we will share in that glory because of His grace. It will be beyond all we could ever ask or imagine. He is infinitely creative and Heaven will reflect that creativity all to His glory and we will get to live there with Him.

Go back to our passage in **Revelation 21**. It says that it shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel. Then John goes on to describe the enormous and incredibly beautiful city. Just try to imagine how big and how beautiful this is. The New Jerusalem will be about 1500 miles cubed. Okay, so picture the state of Texas. Imagine driving from El Paso in west Texas to Longview in east Texas. That's a long, long way and it's also about half of one side of this city, the New Jerusalem.

I looked on a map and I'm guessing it will cover about three-fourths of the United States but it says it is as high as it is long and wide so that makes it a perfect cube. It doesn't say it but how else could it be a cube unless it has levels of some kind? I don't know. Maybe it has twelve levels. Whatever it looks like, there will be plenty of room for everybody.

Let me throw in a couple of things here. First, some commentators say that due to its immense size and shape that obviously these measurements are not literal. Surely they are symbolic and maybe that's true but, again, I will always err on the side of taking the Bible literally and I do here as well. First off, God goes into great detail to show us by man's measurements how this place looks. Also, yes, numbers are often symbolic in the Bible but they can be symbolic and literal.

Another thing I want to add here is that I know some of you are thinking you don't care about the size. You just want to go there and not have any more crying and pain and I understand that but, again, God has given us great details here. He told John to write this down for a reason and do you know what that reason is? Why does God do anything? For His glory! Studying this, understanding it and even just thinking about it and discussing it gives God glory and builds us up in the process.

So, we looked briefly at the size of the New Jerusalem. Let's think about the colors. God loves colors. Think about how many different colors He made just humans, not to mention the animals and the fish and the flowers and the sunsets. God's creativity always includes color and this city will be outrageously beautiful in color.

While I might not pronounce each precious jewel correctly in **verses 19-20**, I did look them all up and there is every color of the rainbow decorating the city walls. I downloaded some sunset pics I have taken just to remind us of God's creativity. I may have gone overboard but just think, if this is what this earth looks like now, can you imagine how beautiful and bright and colorful the New Earth is going to be?

It's a common evening for me to sit on the back deck and watch the sunset. Almost every night I think I need to take a picture but what am I going to do with another sunset pic? After a while, even my Mom gets tired of me sending her a picture and a picture doesn't do it justice anyway.

I read the other day that the reason the sky turns different colors is based on a couple of things. Rain and dirt or dust affect it but the main thing has something to do with the wavelengths of the different colors that our eyes see. During the day, the sky is usually

blue because the sun, the source of the light, is close and blue has a short wavelength. In the evening, when the sun is far away, the sky turns red and orange because those colors have long wavelengths. I thought that was interesting. You may not.

But anyway, **verse 23** says that the New Jerusalem will not need the sun because God's glory will give it light and if God's glory is everywhere...what color will the sky be? In **verse 5** of this chapter, Jesus said, "*I am making everything new*" so who knows what color the sky will be but I bet it is rarely a dull gray. Sunrises and sunsets show God's glory. How much more so when His glory is the light? Oh, I can't wait!

Okay, we have to move on. There is way too much stuff here to discuss this morning. You have to come back tonight and we will get into more detail. I want to skip all the way to the last part of our passage this morning. Look at **verse 5 of chapter 22**.

*There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. **And they will reign for ever and ever.***

What do you think it means that we will reign forever and ever? I don't know why exactly, but some people have a hard time with this. But that word "reign" means just exactly what you think it means. What does a king do? He reigns. He has control. He rules and has influence. He has power. The problem is, for an earthly king, power has the tendency to corrupt, doesn't it? Do you know why? Satan.

Satan always wants to counterfeit, corrupt, skew and twist everything God intends for us but reigning is exactly the thing we were created to do. Leave the last book of the Bible and turn all the way over to the first book of the Bible and you'll see why I say that. **Genesis chapter 1, verse 26**.

The New Living Version says, "*Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.'*"

Let us make man in our image and they will reign. Adam and Eve were created to rule and reign over the old earth but they failed. In the New Earth, we won't fail. There will be no greed, no corruption, no bribes or kickbacks. Every Old Testament saint, every New Testament believer, every Christian from every country, every tribe, every class, everywhere will be a ruler over some group or city or nation. How do you like that?

Well, some of you may think you don't necessarily like that. Reigning is not your style. It's not your idea of Heaven. Well, that's okay. It's God's idea of Heaven and if God wants you to rule, then He will give you the gifts, the abilities and the mindset to do it and do it well, without the curse of sin that we have now.

Whatever your opinion is of President Trump, I'm sure all of us think sometimes about what he could do or say or not say that would be better. It's that way with every president. We're all great armchair presidents. Well, imagine how it is going to be in Heaven when you really can make those decisions but you will have the very presence of God there with you to make wise and beneficial choices for everybody.

Because crowns are the primary symbol of ruling, every mention of crowns in the Bible is a reference of our ruling with Jesus. (Heaven, Randy Alcorn, page 217) **Revelation 2:10** says, *"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."* **Revelation 2:26** says, *"To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations."* **Revelation 3:11** says, *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

In **Luke 19**, in the parable of the king's servants, Jesus talks about those who are faithful with little will be given much and even talks about it being cities that we are to take charge of. I don't know where every person will reign but your eternal satisfaction and fulfillment depends on your faithfulness here in this life. Heaven is going to be great for everybody there but some people, the ones that are faithful and obedient here, will have more satisfaction, more blessings – yes, even more fun – than those who are not.

I think about the thief on the cross next to Jesus. The man never did one thing in this world for the sake of Christ or in His name. All he did was at the very last minute he believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Messiah, the Way, the Truth and the Life and that he wasn't getting to the Father or to Heaven except through Jesus. That's all it took for that man to make it to Heaven but he got there with no crowns or rewards to speak of.

Even he will reign over something. It may be a hut out in the woods or something. I don't know. But I want more for my eternity. How about you? Are you being faithful with what you have been given in this life? If we were created to reign and our reigning will be for the glory of God, I don't want to give Him the bare minimum glory. I want everybody in my life here on earth and in the next life in the New Earth to say, *"Look at what God has done in Him and through him. If God can use him and bless him, the broken man and cracked vessel that he is, I wonder what God can do through me."*

Music

Maybe, like that thief on the cross, you have spent your life doing what you think is best, without any real regard for what God says or wants from you. How's that working out for you so far? **Proverbs 14:12** says, "*There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*" I love you too much to not tell you the truth. There is a real Heaven and a real Hell. Repent and turn away from your sin. Ask for forgiveness of that sin and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and make Him Lord of your life today. We are not guaranteed another breath. Do it right now as the music plays.