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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I want to talk to you about a very special subject close to my heart the older I get, the more of my friends and loved ones go to this place and the more special it is to me. That place is heaven! You ought to be interested in heaven if you are a Christian, because you want to learn as much as you can about where you are going to spend eternity. I was talking to the children this morning in one Sunday School class and the Sunday School teacher asked the children, “How many of you boys and girls want to go to heaven?” Everybody except one little boy raised their hands. She said, “Sonny, you mean you don’t want to go to heaven?” He said “Well, my mother said I had to come straight home from Sunday School!” You may be saying, “I want to go but in the Lord’s timing that’s when I want to go.”

I want to talk about Heaven. Look at Revelation 20:15. I want you to see the contrast because in my mind the rest of Revelation is glorious. We’re going to leave all the bad news about judgement and punishment behind. Revelation 20:15 is where we finished last week. “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” But look what the next verse says,

Revelation 20:1-8. “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. 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, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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.’

He 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.’

He said to me: ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.’

Let’s talk about heaven as John describes it, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to a new heaven and a new earth. Don’t try to place it anywhere on planet earth now, because the Bible says clearly the old heaven and the old earth were passed away. We have no frame of reference with which to compare it so you just have to imagine it’s absolutely new, because that’s what Jesus says “Behold, I make all things new.” Notice three things about this.

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

New Jerusalem is depicted as the “capitol city” of the eternal kingdom of God. But it’s not all there is to the new heaven and the new earth. The word “heaven” can be used to describe three things. There’s the first heaven, which speaks of the atmosphere, the sky. The Bible speaks of the birds that fly in the heavens so that’s one use of the word. The second use of the word “heaven” means “cosmic space,” because the Bible says, “When I consider the heavens, the works of thy hands” talking about the stars and the moon. Space is like the second. Then the third use of the word “heaven” is the dwelling place of God. Whenever you read the word “heaven” in the Bible, you have to make the distinction between the three. There are not “seven heavens.” I don’t know where that expression came from. “I was caught up into the seventh heaven.” The Bible doesn’t talk about that.

However, Paul talks about “a man in Christ” in 2 Corinthians 12:2. I believe it was Paul but he doesn’t make it really clear who was caught up to the third heaven and saw things so amazing. I believe the apostle Paul was given some kind of supernatural vision of the third heaven—not the atmosphere, not space—but the dwelling place of God and Paul was so enamored by it God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. He was so ego-inflated he said he needed this thorn in the flesh and that’s why Paul could write in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” He said, “I have a desire to depart and be with Christ. I want to go to heaven! But I’ll stay if that’s what God wants me to do.” I believe once you catch a glimpse of this third heaven that will also be the desire of your heart to want to do like Paul. “I am ready. I desire, but I’ll wait until it is God’s time for me.”

There are three things described about heaven in this first section. First consider

A. Heaven’s preparation

Jesus said in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.” Jesus is the Master Carpenter and isn’t it exciting to think for the last two thousand years Jesus, the Master Carpenter has been in heaven preparing a place for you? That’s one analogy but look at the analogy John sees here in verse 2. “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride.” I participated in a beautiful wedding last night and I think over and over again there is hardly anything more beautiful than a bride prepared for her husband: dressed up, makeup, hair fixed. When I stand at a wedding and those doors open and the bride comes through the door, I glance at her but then I glance at the groom, because I want to see his face. His expressions run the gamut of emotions, because there is just something about seeing that bride! There is no such thing as an ugly bride. I remember 20 years ago I stood in Morningview Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama when that back door opened and Cindy came walking down that aisle. I suppose I have never seen anything as beautiful a sight as I saw that night. She walked down there and the preacher said, “Wilt thou?” and I just wilted right there in front of everybody! There is something so beautiful about a bride, so when John sees heaven he says, “It is so beautiful! It is like a bride who has been prepared for her husband. She has sacrificed everything. She has gone to all manner of cost to prepare herself for her husband. John said, “That’s how beautiful it is going to be!”

B. Heaven’s peace

There will also be a peace in heaven. This is one of my favorite verses in the scriptures. Look if you will in verse 4. The Bible speaks of the tranquility, the calm, and the peacefulness of heaven. It says in verse 4 that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Have you ever heard anybody say, “There will be no tears in heaven”? The Bible doesn’t say that. The Bible says, “At this time God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” So up until this point there might have been some tears in heaven. What would the tears be for? Well I don’t know. Perhaps someone you loved that you wanted to be saved was not saved. Perhaps as a Christian, you realize you could have done so much more for Christ but you didn’t do much with the gifts you were given. That may cause you grief but whatever happens up to this point the Bible says, “At this time God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Let me tell you what I love about the Bible: There is no devil in the first two chapters and there is no devil in the last two chapters! He’s completely done away with! I go back to the first of my Bible to the book of Genesis and I read about those first tears after Cain killed Abel, how Adam and Eve must have wept bitter tears. And there has been a trail of tears throughout history. I suppose everybody in this room at one time or another has cried for one reason or another: disappointment, heartache, pain, or grief. Can you imagine the time is going to come when God will wipe away all the tears of every person there? He says, “No more need to cry. No more need to weep. There’s no reason to weep anymore.

I love the things that aren’t going to be in heaven as much as the things that will be there. There will be no more death. The first death in the Bible was when Cain slew his brother Abel and since that time, there has been a long funeral procession of person after person dying and the same thing that was said about crying could be said about burying. I suppose everybody in this room at one time or another has been touched by death. If you haven’t yet, hang on—you will be. The time will come when you will stand at a casket and you’ll look down into the face of some loved one and those times are such times of sorrow and pain and the Bible says, “In heaven there will be no more death.” There will be no cemeteries, there will be no funeral processions. You won’t need any! God will wipe away your tears. God will take away death. There will be no more mourning or crying, no tears, because there won’t be any mourning or crying. No more pain. I believe there are some of you who live with pain almost constantly who are physically hurting at this moment, yet you come to church. There is physical pain you deal with. There is emotional pain you have to deal with, the pain of rejection, the pain of failure, the pain of disappointment... Pain is a part of this existence, but God says, “There will be no pain whatsoever!” Heaven is going to be a place of tranquility, peacefulness.

C. Heaven’s population

Who is going to be there? Well just as it tells us what is *not* going to be there in terms of the tranquility, the Bible tells us who will *not* be in heaven. Verse 8. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magical arts, the idolaters and all liars.” Verse 27 of that same chapter goes along with the same idea about who will not be there. “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.”

Are there places on earth where you’d be a little afraid to walk alone at night? Maybe in downtown Dallas, New York City, or even Tyler, Texas. Why? Evil people: criminals, drug addicts, drug abusers, rapists, robbers, thieves, those people are here and we have to live with them but praise God for all eternity we will not live with them, because there won’t be anybody like that there!

Look at that list in verse 8. You’d expect the first two on the list to be murderers or the sexually immoral or the liars or the idolaters but the first two are “the cowardly,” that could be speaking of someone who wanted to accept Christ but just was afraid to do it! Afraid to take a stand for Christ afraid of what somebody might say afraid of what their boss might say afraid of what it might mean to their occupation and so they just were afraid to take a stand for Christ. The next name is “unbelievers.” It could be a man or a woman or a teen that comes to church, sings the songs, but they just never got around to trusting Jesus Christ. They are a good person, a moral person, a kind and loving person—but they never trusted Jesus Christ. The Bible says they are going to be categorized with all these evil folks. The only ones there are going to be those whose names are written down in the Lamb’s book of life.

Is your name written down in the Lamb’s book of life? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Do you remember when Jesus sent out those disciples and told them to cast out demons, to heal in his name, and those disciples came back and the Bible says they were rejoicing? They said, “Lord! We’re so happy! Because even the demons are subject to us in your name!” Jesus said. He said, “Don’t rejoice because demons are subject to you. Rather rejoice because your names are written down in the book of life in heaven.” There is something you can celebrate, something you can rejoice about every day: the fact that when you wake up tomorrow morning, you can wake up with a smile on your face saying, “Praise God! I can rejoice because my name is written down in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Have you ever gone on a trip and made a hotel reservation, then when you got to the registration desk and said, “I have a reservation.” they look in the book and in the computer and say, “Sorry, we don’t have a reservation in that name.” You say, “What happened? I called and you had a reservation for me.” It is a desolate feeling to have made a trip and suddenly realize you might not have a place to stay. There is one reservation you need to be absolutely certain you have made and it is your reservation in heaven. Do you know what your confirmation number is? John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes (trusts in him) shall have everlasting life.”

II. DETAIL OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

Look at the details of the new Jerusalem. John goes into very minute detail and I want to read this lengthy passage.

Revelation 21:9-10. “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’. 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.”

Now do you get the picture? This is a repeat of what John has just seen but he is looking at it from a different perspective. Just as he saw it coming down before, he sees it coming down again from a different perspective.

Verse 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. 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. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations.”

Now picture this. You have walls around the city with three gates on each side. This is just the New Jerusalem of the new heaven. There are twelve foundations. Imagine a concrete foundation and then another foundation and then another foundation on top and another and another until there are twelve layers of foundations.

Verse 14-26. “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 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. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 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. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.”

A stadia is about 1,431 miles—that’s about New York City to Miami in one direction. We’ve already read verse 27 about nothing impure ever entering it. I can remember as a child hearing songs about “streets of gold” and “pearly gates.” This is where it comes from. I can remember telling my mother when I was a preschooler, “Mama, when you bury me put a pick and an axe in the coffin because I want to dig up those streets of gold in heaven!” I didn’t understand what it was really talking about.

I believe what John is using here is human language to try to describe what is indescribable beauty. He is taking earthly jewels and metals like gold and pearl and silver and trying to describe something that is unbelievably beautiful. Notice two things about the details.

A. Magnificent beauty

First is the magnificent beauty of it! John says, “it shines like a glorious jewel. It’s clear as crystal. It’s like streets of gold that are transparent like glass.” That’s nothing that we could even imagine it’s so beautiful. I’m colorblind and the whole time I was growing up I had to have my mother pick out all my colors for me. Since I married, Cindy has to do that. When I was in college, it was pretty rough there for a while. I can remember the Sunday I went to the church where Cindy was and where we later got married. I was sitting up on the platform. I had on one green sock and one brown sock. I didn’t know it. Somebody came up to me after the service and said, “Did you know that you have on one green sock and one brown sock?” I immediately realized what I had done and I said, “Yeah. I have another pair just like it back at college.” When somebody says, “There’s a rainbow.” I look at it and I appreciate it, but I can only see about two different shades in a rainbow. To those of you who can see colors, it’s more beautiful to you. So I’m going to enjoy heaven more than you, because in heaven I’m not going to be colorblind and all the beauty he has described here is going to mean something to me and it’s going to mean something to you as well. He uses all of these twelve jewels and these pictures to symbolize the beauty of it when we can’t even describe it.

I read a true story about a little boy who had sight impairment. He was blind for the first ten years of his life but, because of medical technology and advancements, some surgeons felt there was a surgery they could perform that would restore his sight. They performed this very delicate surgery and he was just a ten-year-old lying there in the hospital when they came and removed the bandages after the surgery. When they removed the bandages he saw for the first time. He looked up into the face of his physician then he looked over into the face of his mother and then he ran to the window of the hospital and he looked outside and he said, “Oh, mother! Oh, mother! Why didn’t you tell me it was so beautiful? The sky is so beautiful! The grass is so beautiful! And look at the birds they are so pretty and mother you are so beautiful! Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell me? Can you imagine the sensory overload somebody like that must experience? Get ready because I think when we get to heaven, we are going to be so overwhelmed with the beauty we’re going to say, “Revelation 21, never even came close to describing the beauty of it.”

B. Massive size

Number two I want you to consider the massive size of it, because it’s pretty amazing. Some of you who are math whizzes, take 1,431 miles multiply it by 1,431 miles multiply it by 1,431 miles again and you get almost three billion cubic miles. It’s amazing the size of this one city! Somebody has done that and figured it out and they said, “Maybe it has different layers and levels? Who knows?” Some people think it’s going to be very crowded in heaven. Well if every layer is like the story on a building and let’s imagine there are going to be about three billion people in heaven—we don’t really know—but in a city that size, three billion people would have forty square miles to themselves. The size is the equivalent of the distance from New York to

Miami, then all the way across the United States up to Denver and back all the way across. That’s just one capitol city of the new heaven and the new earth. When God does something, he does it big!

III. DELIGHTS OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

The final thing I want you to see are the delights of the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 22:1-6. “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 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. 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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.

The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

A. The River of Life

Notice what John says about “the river of life.” He says there is a great street that runs the length of the city. I’d say that’s a pretty long street wouldn’t you? 1,400 miles! It’s a street of gold, “Hallelujah Avenue” or whatever you want to call it, but right in the middle of the boulevard is a river. It’s a river of life and the water is crystal clear. Jesus said earlier in chapter 21, “I invite you to come to the water of life. I will give freely to him that is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” All of us are going to be thirsty Jesus says, “It’s not going to cost you a penny. I’ve already paid the price.” for this beautiful river of life.

When I was in my last year of college, Cindy and I were married. I worked at a church about 75 miles away from Birmingham where I was in school. So every Wednesday night I drove there and back and every Friday I drove to Prattville and drove back on Sunday night. This was really before FM radio. We would tune our AM radio in to WWL in New Orleans and listened to the Mull Singing Convention going back. There was a song they played every Sunday night at the same time. It was some quartet and I’ll never forget it, because we heard it so many times. It lasted four exits along the Interstate. “There is a river that flows from the throne of God.” They just kept singing it over and over and over again. That’s what this is all about. There is a river that flows from the throne of God and this water of life is for nourishment for refreshment for cleansing.

B. The Tree of Life

Not only is there the river of life, there is also the tree of life. What do you picture when I say the tree of life? Do you picture one tree standing there? Well look again. Look at what it says it says, “On each side of the river stood the tree of life.” One tree cannot stand on both sides of the river. This is using that term “tree” generically like we would say, “The pine tree is indigenous to East Texas.” We’re not talking about one tree we’re talking about many trees. So here’s the picture: This river of life is flowing in the middle of this great street and on the outside of the street at intervals are these trees of life. What do they look like? We don’t know, but we know they are fruit trees. They bear fruit every month. I don’t know about you, but I like the idea we’re going to be eating for eternity! When I first discovered that, I was excited to think that angels up there ate with Abraham in the Old Testament. Jesus in his resurrected body went to the Upper Room with the disciples and ate with them, fixed breakfast for them, so we are going to be eating and the fruit of this tree of life is for nourishment but notice it says, “The leaves there are for the health of the nations.” You won’t grow old, you won’t grow tired, and you won’t grow ill, because the health from God will be in the leaves from the tree.

It says in verse 4, “They will see his face” and we’re “going to serve him forever.” We’re not going to be sitting around on a puffy, white cloud with wings—we do not become angels. God has even blessed us beyond the angels. We are his precious children, his saints, his chosen ones. We are going to serve him for all eternity. What makes heaven, heaven? It’s not gates of pearl; it’s not streets of gold; it’s not a tree; it’s not a river—the thing that makes heaven, heaven is JESUS! Heaven is not heaven because of *what* is there—heaven is heaven because of *who* is there. If heaven was in the midst of hell and Jesus was there I’d go to be where Jesus was, because that’s what makes heaven, heaven.

I told my Sunday School class some time ago when I go off on a revival or on a trip or something and I come back, I don’t come into the house and kiss the television set and go over and pat the microwave oven. I don’t go in and look at the silver and check it out and caress it. I go up to my wife and I plant a big Hollywood kiss on her lips and I hug my girls. Home is not home because of what is there—home is home because of *who* is there! And Heaven is heaven because Jesus is there.

CONCLUSION

Fannie Crosby, that great saint of God, the blind hymn writer, was blind and this is what she wrote about the glories of heaven. I want you to remember that a blind woman wrote these words.

When my life-work is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see.
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me!

Through the gates to the city in a robe of spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears shall ever fall.
In the glad song of the ages I shall mingle with delight,
But I long to meet my Savior first of all!

(“My Savior First of All,” Fanny J. Crosby)

When you get to heaven, as much as you think you’d like to see that loved one who has died and gone there, that’s not who you are going to look for first. You’re going to look for Jesus first! And I think I’m going to spend the first two or three billion years just falling at the feet of Jesus saying, “Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!”

Heaven is real! It’s a prepared place. Do you know that you know that you know that you have your reservation made? You can if you’ve said yes to Jesus!

OUTLINE

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM (vs. 21:1-8)

- A. Heaven’s preparation—Like a bride prepared for her husband
- B. Heaven’s peace—no more tears, sorrow, pain, or death!
- C. Heaven’s population—No wicked persons will be there

II. DETAIL OF THE NEW JERUSALEM (vs. 21:9-27)

- A. Magnificent beauty—precious stones emphasize
- B. Massive size (16)—3 billion cubic miles

III. DELIGHTS OF THE NEW JERUSALEM (vs. 22:1-6)

- A. The River of Life—pure water
- B. The Tree of Life—constant fruit