

Introduction

Someone told me as we were leaving last week that the sermon on hell wasn't one they were really longing to hear. I can understand that. It is not that they did not agree or thought it unimportant. It is just the realities of hell are horrific and ghastly, and many of us have loved ones who are closing in on that destiny with every passing day. It is, however, needful to remind us of what is at stake with everyone who does not turn in saving faith to Jesus Christ.

And yet that is not where I wanted to conclude this series of sermons to inspire us on in evangelism. I want to finish up with encouragement, on a high note, and returning to all the happy reasons why we cannot but speak. As believers, we have every reason to be motivated to share the good news because so great is our salvation; so glorious is God; so worthy is Christ; so powerful is the Spirit; and today so wonderful is heaven. We move from speaking of the horrors of hell to extol the happiness of heaven. It is wonderful indeed; and for that reason we cannot but speak. Paul wrote the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." And accompanying that salvation is an underlying hope—the hope of heaven. That hope is another reason why we cannot but speak the glorious gospel of God's salvation.

To set our minds on the wonders of heaven, I want us to turn to the final couple chapters of the book of the Revelation. We will study chapters 21:1-22:5. Stand with me please as we read the word of God.

[Read text and Pray]

This past week the city of Milwaukee has been abuzz. Dignitaries and celebrities and politicians have filled our streets and filled the forum. The city was trying desperately to put its best foot forward and to portray our city as a wonderful destination. There is a lot to like about Milwaukee. It has a certain charm with the Lake, the shore, the Calatrava, the festivals and state fair, as well as its museums, and history. But one of the great

concerns this past week has been public safety. With all of the focus of attention on the Forum and downtown area, the rest of the city has been left with minimal law enforcement. And that has been a cause for alarm because despite the positives, Milwaukee is recognized as one of the most violent cities in America. It is a city of this world and of this age, rife with wickedness and darkness and with a significant degree of fear for personal safety but little fear of the Lord.

If your view of heaven looked like Milwaukee, it would not hold much in the way of hope or incentive to tell others about it. However, we have seen this morning that heaven is unlike any city in this present world. The things that are a blight on this world and in our cities are absent in heaven. And the things that this age and its metropolises lack most abound in heaven. Heaven is the ultimate destination and it is the promised destiny of those who believe in and follow Jesus. As he was preparing his disciples for his imminent departure, Jesus bolstered their hearts with these assurances. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." The place Jesus is preparing is a reason for our hearts not to be troubled. In fact, it is a place to be longed for. The reality of this place undergirds the hope of the people of God. Because of this hope, we cannot but speak.

As we consider heaven this morning, I want you to see that the wonder of heaven stands out because of two overall aspects—what is absent and what abounds. It stands out because of what will never be there, on the one hand, and what will always be there in abundance, on the other.

Let's look first at ...

I. The Absence in Heaven.

It is striking as we read through Revelation 21 and 22 what is said to be absent in heaven. It is a place marked by certain aspects of our lives now that will not be there then. And these are glorious absences.

What is noted to be absent from the outset is the present heaven and the present earth. John says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." We live on the first earth under the first heaven. These are the ones that were made when, as it says in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This heaven and earth have been subjected to the curse of God with the entrance thereunto of sin. They were invaded by the devil to tempt human beings to sin. Human sin has justly been visited on this planet with a curse on the ground. It yields thorns and thistles. Therefore, work is toilsome and arduous. The whole of creation is in bondage to corruption, says the Apostle Paul, and the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now as they await the revealing of the sons of God.

Marks of misery meet us in the face every day. Challenges confront us. Moths destroy; rust corrupts; and mosquitos die. Things break down. Obstacles get in the way. Our bodies wear out. We watch others die. Ultimately we die. And then there is sin. Our own sin is bad, but sin is all around us. Lies and deceit abound. Uncleaness is everywhere. Wars and fighting destroy peace. Murder is rampant. Sexual immorality reaches at the level of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most people worship a false god or no god. Human beings kill their own babies. There is no rest in this world. But with the passing away of this earth and its heaven, these things too will pass away.

In the new heaven and new earth these marks of misery and trouble and limitation will be absent. I have grouped them into four categories. Let's consider four items which will be absent in heaven.

A. First, in the new heaven and earth, all AFFLICTIONS will be absent. The first verse of chapter 21 declares that the sea was no more. The sea is an emblem of unrest and conflict. No more sea means no more conflict. William Hendriksen writes, "The roaring, raging, agitated, tempest-tossed waters, the waves perpetually engaged in combat with one another, symbolize the nations of the world in their conflict and unrest. It is the sea out of which the beast arises. But in the renewed universe—the new heaven and earth—all will be peace." Now look at verse 4 in chapter 21. God "will

wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Tears, death, mourning, crying, pain—all gone. Thorns and thistles also will be extinct. Everything that mitigates against peace will be passed away. Nevermore will they be in the new heaven and new earth. We shed tears for several reasons, but the most prevalent ones are sorrow and pain and affliction. Hell will be filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth and pain and suffering, but none of those conditions will be present in heaven. Afflictions abound now. They are like hurdles. We have to get over them. They are difficult, hurtful, and toss us to and fro; in this way they help us keep from loving this present world. They strengthen our faith and prepare us for heaven. But once we cross the finish line, the hurdles disappear never to return. Afflictions in all their sorts are forever then to be eliminated from our experience. That includes death itself as well as disease and illness. There will be no unhealthy bodies in heaven! No high blood pressure, no COVID, no cancer, no arthritis, no backaches! There will be no need for Motrin or Tylenol or doctors or chiropractors or dentists or hospitals or clinics! Thanks be to God!

But I think of a number of you who at the present time are living with excruciating pain. We all have pain sometime. And the only thing we want when we get it is to get rid of it. In heaven, there will be no more pain. The older we get the more we look forward to pain-free, death-free, turmoil-free living. And that’s the way it will be in heaven!

B. The second item that’s missing in heaven is SIN and everything related to it. In Revelation 21:5, we hear the statement of the one who sits on the throne: “Behold, I am making all things new.” Part of the newness is the elimination of all sin. In verse 8 he assures that “as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murders, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” In verse 27 he adds, “But NOTHING UNCLEAN will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.” The devil will not be in heaven to tempt. Isn’t that good news? He

will not be there to attempt to deceive and lead God's people astray. That's right! All of these absences mean there will be no temptation in heaven.

When you are in the throes of temptation and fighting in the power of the Spirit to resist the devil, it is especially encouraging and relieving that a day is coming when the flesh will be no more. Right now we are living the experience of the flesh being in opposition to the Spirit and the Spirit to the flesh. But there the conflict will be over. We won't have to put on battle armor every day to be ready for the devil's assaults. It will be a forever of rest. In Romans 7 Paul is in agony in the midst of his battle with indwelling sin. He says, "When I want to do right, evil is close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Well, all in heaven are completely delivered by Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God! All things made new means that the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God will be complete in us. There will be no more sin, no more desire to sin, no more impure or ugly thoughts! How wonderful is heaven!

C. I see in John's description of heaven a third striking absence. It seems as though he expected it to be there but it is not. There is no TEMPLE. This detail is related to us in chapter 21:22ff. John says, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb." There was nothing wrong with the Temple God instructed the Israelites to build and in which to worship. However, the temple demonstrated the separation that exists between him and his people due to sin. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn in two representing the direct access we have to God through Christ. In heaven the elimination of the temple emphasizes the full presence of God throughout. His glory will not be shrouded or hidden. It will not be contained to a place within the heavens but will be unrestrained in its fullness. The glory of God will not be mitigated in any way by the darkness of our minds. His light will fill his people at all times.

D. Correspondingly and finally, there is no night in heaven. Revelation 21:25 says, "There will be no night there." There is no need of sun or lamp, but neither is there night because the glory of God is the light of heaven.

That light never goes out. It is just mind-boggling. Night time is often when enemies secretly attack. It is when people stumble and fall. It is when people get lost. It is also when people carouse. None of that will be in heaven because there will be no night. With no enemies to attack and no night in which to give them the opportunity, the gates of the city remain open. And you can always find your way. It is comforting to know what we have to deal with now that we won't have to deal with in heaven. How can we not speak to others to urge them to set their faith on Christ Jesus because the destiny of believers is so wonderful.

Next, let's look next at ...

II. The Abundance in Heaven.

The many things that destroy and disturb our lives in the present time will be absent in heaven. And at the same time the many things that delight God's people and give us peace and joy will abound in heaven. In John's account he provides details of things that permeate the new heaven and earth. They are things that redound unto joy and delight. What fills heaven is delightful, beautiful, satisfying, and thrilling. I want to highlight several features which gloriously abound in heaven.

A. In heaven there is an abundance of the PRESENCE of God. It is highlighted first in verse 3 of chapter 21. A loud voice from the throne said, "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." This permeating presence is reiterated in the fact that there is no temple but the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

God is omnipresent, even now and forever. He is always present everywhere, and there is nowhere you can go where he is not. But in heaven his presence is experienced in a more powerful way because his presence is made known in a more concentrated way. It is the glorious presence of God in communion with his people. On earth God has made himself known at various times in various ways. He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden until they sinned. Incidentally, there is imagery which points us to even better communion in heaven. Down in chapter 22:1-2 there is the river of the water of life flowing through the middle and on

either side the tree of life. We have a picture of Eden now as it was supposed to be.

Not only did the Lord commune with Adam and Eve, he also spoke to Noah and then to Abraham. He came to visit Abraham in a few different ways, yet for much of the time it seemed God was silent. God spoke to Moses wonderfully and Moses longed to see the glory of the Lord, but the Lord said you cannot see my glory and live. The Lord spoke through the prophets in various ways and times. And at last he spoke to us in his Son Jesus. We beheld his glory in that way. The Spirit brings to us the knowledge of the presence of the Lord, but still we long and hunger for more.

The presence of God for which Christians hunger and thirst will be known in heaven. As Paul said, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Just think what that means! How well does God know you? How well does God know me? David says he knows everything about us. In Psalm 139 David reckons with God's knowledge of him. He writes, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether." Almighty God knows us through and through. Nothing holds him back from knowing us completely. In heaven the presence of God will be so permeating so full and so rich that we will know him in the depths of which he knows us! Every man and every woman who knows God wants to know him more. In heaven we will know him more than we can dream. And that knowledge will engulf our souls with exhilaration and delight.

B. Because of the presence of God in heaven, there will be PLEASURE like humans have never experienced before. Far greater than the pleasures of sex or gluttony or intoxicants. The pleasures of heaven are soul-satisfying. In hell there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. But in heaven there is joy unspeakable and full of glory. In the inescapable, permeating presence of God, the Bible says there is fullness of joy and at his right hand are

pleasures forevermore. The pleasure of his presence is the root of all heavenly pleasures.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Not only will we see God in heaven, but we will see him so well because we will be like him. First John 3:2 says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." Revelation 22:4 says that his servants will "see his face." The great yearning of Moses, "Lord, show me your glory," will be granted to all who are in heaven. And they shall be satisfied. Beholding the glory of God, we will be changed into the same glory. From Jesus' parable of the weeds and the wheat, he indicated that at the harvest the weeds are burned while the wheat is gathered into the Master's barn. He explained that in the kingdom of his Father, the righteous would "shine like the sun." Listen to Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness." The key feature and soul-satisfying aspect of the wonder of heaven is the permeating soul-engulfing presence of God.

C. Not only is heaven filled with the presence of God and pleasure from God, it is also filled with the PRAISE of God. Revelation 22:3 says that in heaven his servants will WORSHIP him. We have seen that heaven is filled with worship. In Revelation 4 praise goes to him who sits on the throne. "Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power." In Revelation 5 praise goes to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Worship is one of the most thrilling exercises of the heart for the people of God!

If you have followed any of the Republican Nation Convention this past week, you have seen a lot of exuberance and chanting and excitement. Those people seemed to be having a good time. But it is unworthy to be compared to the excitement and joy in heaven as God's people overflow with songs of praise, with lives of purity, and with words of ecstasy ascribing salvation to Christ our king.

The world God created should be ceaseless in praise and worship, but it takes His name in vain, and complains for what it does not have. We who believe should be just the opposite—abounding in praise and overflowing with thanksgiving, giving glory to God. That’s definitely going to be part of the joy of heaven. Why not let it be our joy on earth?

D. Before closing I would point you to see a couple more points of the abundance of heaven. For one, there is PIZZAZ in abundance in heaven. It is a place of unspeakable beauty. Its pizzaz corresponds to the magnificence of what goes on there. John describes the radiance of the city as that of a most rare jewel. Jasper clear as crystal is like a diamond. Every kind of jewel adorns the city gates and walls. Its beauty alone is a pleasure to behold. Its dimensions direct us to the tabernacle and temple reflecting again the communion of God with his people.

E. Then there is PROTECTION. God’s people have nothing to fear. The city’s gates remain open because there is no threat to God’s people.

F. And finally, here in the destiny of God’s people there is PERMANENCE. Heaven is forever. There is no death and in verse 5 of chapter 22 we are told that God’s people reign with him forever and ever.

In hell the worm dies not and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. Heaven though is wonderful and glorious, and forever the pleasure of God’s people never diminishes in delight and abounding joy. It is eternal! What a glorious destiny! How can we keep silent?

Conclusion

Hell is the place no one would want to go. Today we have drunk in the delights of heaven. It is the place no one wants to leave. But leave heaven is precisely what Jesus did when he came to this earth. He shared in the glory of heaven but left it for what must have seemed like ten thousand years though it was only about 33. Although in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

That is what it took for him to be able to save his people from their sins. That is what it took gain an affirmative answer to his prayer request in John 17:24. There Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory." For his people to be with him in heaven, Jesus had to leave heaven and come to earth and be our sin offering. And that is what he was willing to do for us. We cannot but speak of Jesus and we cannot but speak in part because of the place he is preparing for us.

May God fuel our hope in the midst of all the tribulation we experience now, and may he thrust us out into the fields which are white unto harvest because we cannot but speak of what great things he has in store for us!

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope and boldly share that hope with a world that has so little of it. Amen.