



An 85-year-old couple died in a car crash after being married almost 60 years. They'd been in good health the last 10 years mainly due to the wife's interest in health food. When they reached the pearly gates, Peter took them to their mansion, which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen, master bath suite and jacuzzi. As they marveled at it all, the old man asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. "It's free," Peter replied, "this is heaven."

Next they went out back to survey the championship golf course that backed up to the home. They'd have golfing privileges everyday, and each week the course changed to a new one. The old man asked, "What are the green fees?" Peter said, "This is heaven, it's free."

Next they went to the club house and saw the lavish buffet lunch. The old man asked, "How much will this cost?" Peter got a bit frustrated and said, "Don't you understand yet? This is heaven, it's free!" The guy looked around and asked, "Where are the low fat and low cholesterol tables?" Peter said, "That's the best part! You can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is heaven."

With that the old man went into a fit of anger. He threw down his hat and stomped on it. Peter and the man's wife both tried to calm him down and asked him what's wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "This is all your fault. If it weren't for your blasted bran muffins, I could have been here 10 years ago!"

Today we're looking at the last two lines of the Apostles' Creed: *I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.* That's talking about heaven. We say we believe in heaven, but we spend a lot of our lives trying to **stay** here and not go there. I think if we knew how marvelous heaven is, we'd be anxious to get there sooner rather than later. Paul wrote, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." We can't possibly comprehend what heaven is like. It's like a fetus trying to understand what life outside the womb is like. But the Bible tells us enough about it to whet our appetite.

Today I want to whet your appetite with a glimpse of heaven from Rev. 21:1–22:5. In these chapters the Apostle John has a vision of heaven. He hears a voice that says, "**Behold, I am making all things new.**" He says in v. 1 "**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.**" This new creation is pictured as a city. He says in v.

2, "**I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**" A new creation! A holy city! As John surveys all this he describes several things that are **not** in that city and several things that **are** in it. I want to use these two headings to gather up all that John sees.

What Is Not There.

The sea

First of all, John mentions several things that are **not** there. He says in v. 1 there's "**no longer any sea.**" That's kind of a bummer. I love the sea. How can there be no sea in heaven? But in the Bible the sea represents the forces of chaos. It's unpredictable. It can rise up and wipe out hundreds of thousands of people like in a great tsunami. And remember here in Revelation it was the rebellious beast who came up out of the sea. When he says "there was no longer any sea," it's another way of saying in this new city the forces of chaos and rebellion are gone. No more typhoons and earthquakes. No more jumbo jets plunging 24,000 feet into the ocean. No more children accidentally killing each other with their parents' loaded guns. No more disgruntled employees barging into an office and mowing people down with an automatic rifle.

Tears, death, mourning, crying or pain

This goes along with the next thing that's **not** there. Look at v. 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.**" I was thinking of how many people will be out of jobs there—counselors, doctors, insurance agents, policemen, maybe even pastors! All these things are part of the old order. Isn't it something that no matter how far we advance technologically, no matter how much money, fame or power we have, our lives are still marked by tears, pain, death and mourning. Who hasn't been touched by them? We come to church and we all look so good, so put together. But you have no idea how that person near you is suffering. Maybe it's chronic pain, or the ache of a broken relationship, or depression, or addiction or the loss of a child or a parent. In this new city, all of that is gone. You know how we say "hello" to someone and usually ask "How you doing?" We won't have to do that anymore in heaven because the answer will always be the same—"I'm doing great!"

Those not in the Book of Life

A third thing **not** there are people whose names aren't written in the Book of Life. Look at v. 8. He says, *"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."* Later in v. 27 he says, *"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."* These, of course, are difficult words to hear. They remind us not everyone will be there. We may wonder, will I even be there? Haven't I done things shameful and deceitful? But he's not talking here about people who sin. The Bible says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But notice throughout these verses Jesus is called "the Lamb." Why is He called the Lamb? Because He was the sacrificial Lamb of God who offered Himself for our sins. He died for the people who do what's "shameful and deceitful." But it's those who refuse to come to the Lamb and trust in Him who aren't written in the Lamb's Book of Life and so they won't be there.

The temple

A fourth thing that will **not** be there is the temple. Down in v. 22 John says, *"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."* For a Jewish man like John, the temple is the place where God dwells. For him to say there's no temple is unthinkable. If there's no temple, where's God? But what John is really saying is the whole city is the temple. God's dwelling place is no longer a place in the city, but it's the city itself! That's what's being communicated in verses 16-17 when he gives the measurements of the city. He describes it as being laid out as a square cube. Do you know what else was a cube in the Bible? The Holy of Holies in the temple was a cube (1 Kings 6:20). That was the sacred place where God dwelt. But here the city is measured off as a cube because the city itself is the Holy of Holies. So when you're in the city you're in God. That's kind of a mind blower. It's like the whole city is engulfed in God. We'll no longer stand **before** God but we'll live **in** God. I can't really grasp that. There's some mystery here.

Sun or moon

Another thing **not** there is the sun or the moon. Look at v. 23, *"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it..."* We'll talk more about this later, but for now just take note it doesn't just say there's no sun or moon but that there is no **need** for the sun or the moon. Why? Because as we'll see there's another source of light.

Night

This goes along with what comes next. In 2:5 it says *"there will be no more night."* Earlier in 21:25 he says, *"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there."* Earlier John

noticed there were twelve gates each with an angel. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Normally, the gates of a city were closed at night to provide security for the people inside. But now there's no need for that. There's no night and so the gates stay open and all kinds of people, even foreigners, can come in. It's like there's no border patrol. No immigration problem. This was a fulfillment of Israel's original purpose. When God called Abraham the father of Israel, he said they'd be a blessing to all the nations of the world. But by the time Jesus entered the gates of the old Jerusalem on Palm Sunday Israel's only concern was for herself. Not so in heaven. There's no night there and so the gates are never shut.

Curse

There's one more thing **not** there. Verse 3 in chapter 22 says *"no longer will there be any curse."* After Adam and Eve disobeyed God's one command, Eden came under a curse. The ground was cursed. It would only yield fruit with toil and sweat. Relationships were cursed. Husbands would try to rule over their wives with a heavy hand. Wives would suffer through childbirth. But in the new creation, which was like a new Eden, there will no longer be a curse.

So that's what's **not** there. Honestly, I don't think we'll miss any of those things. And that's because of what **is** there.

What Is There.

God is there

Most importantly, God is there. John sees the holy city coming down and he hears a loud voice 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"* (v. 3). This is the fulfillment of all the covenant promises reiterated for centuries. In 22:3 it says, *"The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city."* So God the Father and God the Son are there. We already saw how the city itself is the Holy of Holies. Sometimes I wonder what excites us more—all the wonderful things about heaven, or the One we'll get to be with in heaven? John Piper asks, "The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?" We might think we could be satisfied without Him there, but we couldn't.

Glory is there

This leads to the second thing John saw there: glory, lots of glory! What will make heaven most spectacular is the radiant glory of God. Verse 11 says this holy city, *"...shone with the glory of God,*

and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." The Greek word for glory is *doxa* and it means "heavy, weighty." It points to the weightiness of God's person. Glory radiates from His being. It's what makes Him God. Verse 23 tells us this glory replaces even the sun and moon. It says, *"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."* It's like John is walking around dazzled by the glory that lights up the city but he can't figure out where it all comes from. He looks high and low and finally he sees a figure out of which all this light is pouring forth. He cries out with recognition, "It's the Lamb! The lamp is the Lamb!" The lamp giving off all this light is One you would least expect; the One slaughtered for our sins; the crucified Savior! There's no higher affirmation of the person and work of Jesus than to say He's the source of the glory of God. It's like the old hymn:

*Fair is the sunshine
Fairer still the moonlight
And all the twinkling starry host
Jesus shines brighter
Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heaven can boast*

Materiality is there

In light of all this glory, the next thing that is there might surprise you. Materiality is there. In other words, stuff is there. Some people think about heaven as a state of mind or a nonphysical realm—not somewhere you go, but some esoteric, undefined existence. But John describes something material. There are stones and gems and streets. There are walls and gates. There are fruit trees and a river. Someone has said the Christian faith is the most materialistic of all faiths. In a way that's true. The Christian vision of the future is earthy. In describing heaven, the Bible always envisions men and women on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earth. God made us for earth and He'll fulfill that original intent by placing us on a new earth. Our destiny is **not** to go to heaven. Our destiny is for the heavenly city to come down to us. Our vision of the future is **not** other worldly; it's new worldly. And we'll not be freed from our bodies; at the resurrection, these old bodies will be renewed, like with Jesus after He was raised up. What was Jesus' risen body like? Flesh and blood. Scars. They touched Him, talked with Him and saw Him eat. It was Him. It was the same body but it was new and different.

Remember the Transfiguration when Jesus appeared on the mountain with Moses and Elijah? That was a little glimpse of the future. It's like a little bit of heaven leaked into the present and Peter, John and James got to see it. It says of Jesus, *"His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them"* (Mk 9:3). It's interesting, even with that they were still able to recognize Moses and Elijah. They'd never seen them

before but they knew who they were. How great is this. We'll know who people are even though we never knew who they were on earth!

Peoples are there

Here's another thing that will be there: "peoples" will be there. In v. 3 when God says, *"they will be my people"* He really uses the plural "peoples." The idea of "peoples" points to the full range of ethnic diversity. All the nations of the earth will be represented. We see this down in verses 24–26. It says, *"The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it."* Then in v. 26 it says, *"The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it."* So all the different people groups of the world will be represented there. It will be like that ceremony you watch before the Olympics where all the different nations march into the Olympic stadium proudly dressed in clothes unique to their country. Heaven is big enough for the full range of the world's ethnic and cultural diversity. This goes back to the open gates. All peoples are welcome and they'll bring with them all the beauty of their culture. I don't believe our cultural distinctions will be obliterated in heaven. They'll be celebrated and appreciated. This goes along with the fact that the size of the city is enormous. John measures it as 1,500 square miles. If we take that literally that's 396,000 stories, each having an area as big as 1/2 of the USA. Divide that into separate condos and you have plenty of room for all the redeemed from every nation!

Life is there

The fifth thing that will be there is life. Look at the first few verses of chapter 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 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."* The first Eden was a beautiful, luscious garden where God placed Adam and Eve and told them to cultivate it. It had rivers flowing through it and a tree of life. In this new Eden, the crystal clear river of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb down the middle of the street. It flows with the life of God. And there's a tree of life. Remember in the first Eden after Adam and Eve sinned they were cast out of the garden and the tree of life was blocked. But here everyone has free access to it. And it's loaded with fruit. You've heard of the "fruit of the month club." Well, this tree has twelve kinds of fruit, one for every month! Somehow its leaves bring healing to not just a select few, but to all the nations of the earth. I think of a place like Niger, Africa where I was last summer. So barren; so bleak. So much pain and suffering. But in heaven Niger will be healed.

Service is there

You might be wondering, what will we do there? Eternity is a long time. We know of course from other parts of Revelation

we'll participate in worship before the throne. But that's not all. In 22:3 it says **"his servants will serve him."** Heaven won't be an eternal day off. We'll serve Him. He'll give us assignments. We know in the first Eden there was work to do. God told Adam to care for the earth and cultivate it. In the new Eden there will be work as well. It won't have the drudgery attached to our present work has. It will be joyful, creative and productive work. Dallas Willard writes, "We will not sit around looking at one another or at God for eternity but will join...in the endlessly ongoing creative work of God. It is for this that we were each individually intended, as both kings and priests. Thus, our faithfulness over a 'few things' in the present phase of our life develops the kind of character that can be entrusted with 'many things.' We are, accordingly, permitted to 'enter into the joy of our Lord'. That 'joy' is, of course, the creation and care of what is good, in all its dimensions..." Won't it be fun to find out your assignments? And everyone will love their assignments. Nobody will be saying TGIF. In fact, no one will even want to go home on Friday!

His face is there

There's one more thing there. John saved the best for last. It's the face. John says, **"They will see his face and his name will on their foreheads"** (22:4). Can that really be? The whole Bible up to this point has stressed that no one can see God's face and survive. God said to Moses, **"you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live"** (Ex 33:20). But in heaven we'll see His face. The reason we'll be able to see His face is we ourselves will be changed. It's interesting how John adds, "his name will be on their foreheads." Name stands for character. His character will be on our foreheads. We'll be like Him and fit to see Him face to face.

Maybe you're wondering how all of this talk of heaven might make a difference in your life today. Again, let's stick with John. Let's go to one of his letters. 1 John 3:2 says this: **"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet**

been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Seeing Jesus will change us into His likeness and being changed will allow us to continue to see Him face to face. That's our hope of heaven.

But John doesn't stop there. He then says, **"All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."** There it is. If you have the hope of seeing Him face to face you'll want to purify yourself for Him.

Let me use two analogies, one that maybe men will relate to better and the other more for women. For men: Andrew Luck will soon be the no. 1 pick in the NFL draft and he'll sign a contract worth millions of dollars. Does that make him complacent now or does that provide a stimulus to work hard and prepare? His whole life now is shaped by what he will soon receive.

Now one for women: Imagine a bride-to-be. She looks forward to her wedding day. She counts off the days. She wants to be ready. As the day grows closer, she prepares herself even more diligently. Her longing to be with the One she loves motivates her to prepare. It's no wonder the new Jerusalem came down from heaven "like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Who is her husband? It's the Lamb! And we're the bride. The new city, of which we'll be a part, will shine with the beauty of the lamb and be joined with him.

But meanwhile, we prepare ourselves. We fight hard against all those things that might cause us shame when we see Him. Jesus put it this way, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

*I would like to acknowledge my dependence on Darrell W. Johnson's book, *Discipleship On The Edge*, for the outline that is reflected in this message.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.