

## **Taking the Ho-Hum Out of Heaven**

**Texts:** Revelation 21:1-5

To explore the revelation which John received concerning the creation of the new heaven and new earth, and how that affects the way we live our lives today. [Deliver this message after the reading for Week 13 is completed.]

### **Back Story**

In the first chapter of the Bible, God creates our world and pronounces everything good. Roses and redwoods, elephants and giraffes, sunrise and sunset... God saw that it was good!

But sin entered our world and we now live in a broken planet, with broken souls, broken relationships, broken spirits and broken hearts. We still have stunning glimpses of natural beauty, hinting at the perfection of original creation, but we are badly scarred by the effects of sin. Jesus entered the world to restore and redeem that which was marred and ruined by the fall.

Now, as the Bible comes to a close, John, the disciple of Jesus, receives a revelation of a new heaven and new earth. In Revelation 21, God pronounces, *I am making everything new*. The curtain is thrown back and we view a second creation. The Bible ends where it began: with a good creation and unbroken fellowship with God.

### **Sermon Purpose and Outline**

This sermon will explore the future hope of a new heaven and new earth. Often, our images of heaven are so bland and boring that they fail to fill us with hope. A clear glimpse of the future world God has promised should stir us with deep anticipation for the future, and a perspective that changes the way we live in the meantime.

**Sermon Question: How can anticipation of heaven change my life here below?**

- 1. The New Earth Is So Spectacular, You'll Long to Be There.** Revelation 21:1-2
- 2. God's Presence Is So Remarkable, You'll Want to Prepare.** Revelation 21:3
- 3. Final Healing Is Such a Comfort, You'll Overcome Despair.** Revelation 21:4-5

### **Sermon Introduction**

What comes to your mind when you think of heaven? When a cartoonist sketches a picture of heaven, what items are usually included in the picture?

### **Creative Teaching Tool**

Show cartoons with the typical depictions of heaven, complete with billowing clouds, St. Peter at the gate, and people in robes with wings.

There are three or four standard features in common portrayals of heaven. Billowy white clouds, people with little wings floating around, and perhaps St. Peter at heaven's gate.

Let me ask you something... does this inspire you? Does it provide a compelling picture of the future with God? Does this bland image make you long to leave our current world, with all its beauty and color, in order to spend eternity there?

As we open our Bibles to Revelation 21, we find quite a different picture of what God has planned for us. It is possible that this passage will drastically change your image of heaven.

### **Connection to the Overarching Theme: The Journey of Faith**

Without the promise of heaven, our journey of faith has no ending point, no meaning, no goal. John's vision in Revelation provides us with the culmination of the journey of faith we have taken through the whole Bible. The Old Testament and the Law create in us a hunger for the Messiah, and the first advent of Jesus in the gospels looks ahead to the day when he will reign over the new earth as the victorious Messiah.

Let's look ahead to the conclusion of our journey of faith, and see how our final destination should impact the way we travel until we get there.

### **Sermon Question: How can anticipation of heaven change my life here below?**

#### **1. The New Earth Is So Spectacular, You'll Long to Be There.** Revelation 21:1-2

*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.*

When John tries to find words to describe the splendor of the new Jerusalem, he says it's like “a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” The wedding day is the day a woman is at her most beautiful, enhanced not only by a gorgeous wedding dress, but glowing from within with the beauty of being loved. We often make the mistake of imagining the new heaven and the new earth as a drab, colorless version of our world today, when in reality it is every feature of our current earth, enhanced to its utter brilliant best, like a woman on her wedding day.

### Illustration

In his book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, Baptist pastor Don Piper attempts to explain what he experienced in heaven during the time between when he was killed in a car crash—and ninety minutes later—when he spontaneously resuscitated.

*Everything I experienced was like a first-class buffet for the senses. I could hardly grasp the vivid, dazzling colors. I felt as if I had never seen, heard, or felt anything so real before. The best way I can explain it is to say that I felt as if I were in another dimension. Never, even in my happiest moments, had I ever felt so fully alive. Everything around me glowed with a dazzling intensity. In heaven, each of our senses is immeasurably heightened to take it all in. What a sensory celebration!*

*Myriads of sounds so filled my mind and heart. The most amazing one was the angels' wings. I didn't see them, but the sound was a beautiful, holy melody with a cadence that seemed never to stop. The swishing resounded as if it was a form of never-ending praise. A second sound I call music, but it differed from anything I had ever heard on the earth. The nonstop intensity and endless variety of the melodies of praise overwhelmed me.*

*Hymns of praise, modern-sounding choruses, and ancient chants filled my ears and brought not only a deep peace but the greatest feeling of joy I've ever experienced. I couldn't calculate the number of songs – perhaps thousands – offered up simultaneously, and yet there was no chaos, because I had the capacity to hear each one and discern the lyrics and melody.*

*Everything I saw was bright – the brightest colors my eyes had ever beheld – so powerful that no earthly human could take in this brilliance. As I reached the gate, which was iridescent pearl that glowed and shimmered, my senses were even more heightened, and I felt deliriously happy. I knew everything would be even more thrilling when I got inside. At that very moment I was about to realize the yearning of every human heart.*

— Don Piper, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, pages 24-35

Does that sound bland? Boring? Tedious? Dull? No! Heaven is intensely, unimaginably, beyond wonderful! If we are to believe the apostle John's attempts to describe heaven using human terms like a bride, jewels, pearls, crystal, light, gold, and glory, then we have to let go of our presuppositions of eternal boredom and everlasting dullness, and by faith anticipate a new heaven and new earth that transcends anything we can imagine or find words to describe adequately. The new earth is so spectacular, you'll want to be there. Will you be there? Is your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life?

### Cross Reference

Revelation 21:27 TEV

*"But nothing that is impure will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies. Only those whose names are written in the **Lamb's book of the living** will enter the city."*

### 2. God's Presence Is So Remarkable, You'll Want to Prepare. Revelation 21:3

*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.**"*

God with us! In the first creation, before sin entered our world, God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve in unbroken fellowship and community. Now as the Bible comes to a close, God once again is freely interacting with those who are made in his image.

### Illustration

To know and love and enjoy our Creator King is what we were made for. But let's think about that for a minute. Just imagine showing up at a mansion that the king built especially for you, and you're about to meet that king for the first time. You'd want to bring him a hostess gift, right? Probably, if you were to really project what you'll be feeling at that moment, you'd want to give him far beyond a hostess gift. You'll be so grateful and so humbled and so overwhelmed by his presence, that you'll be wishing there was some kind of heavenly department store you could run into to buy him something that comes close to expressing your utter thankfulness.

But, by the time you get to that moment, all of your opportunities to invest in gifts for the king are already passed. The only things you have to bring to him are those that haven't already been burned in the fire of judgment. Anything you have done on earth that's sinful, or self-centered, or

motivated by pride, is burned up and gone. The only things you'll have left to offer him are the jewels and the gold that are formed by your acts of faith and obedience, and the crowns you earned by doing things like bringing people along with you to heaven.

*"There are no crownwearers in Heaven that were not crossbearers here below."*

— Spurgeon

### Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:25

*"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but **we do it to get a crown that will last forever.**"*

Matthew 6:19-21

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But **store up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Ephesians 5:15-16

*"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, **making the most of every opportunity**, because the days are evil."*

So, how can anticipation of heaven change our lives here below? If we think ahead to how we'll feel when we meet God face-to-face, we'll want to make the most of every opportunity here on earth to prepare for that moment. We'll want to have gifts in our hands to offer to him, so we invest in heavenly treasure, and thus we receive the jewels and crowns that are rewarded for a life of faith.

### 3. Final Healing Is Such a Comfort, You'll Overcome Despair. Revelation 21:4-5

*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."*

As you think of what God has planned for our future with him, we need to remember what won't be there. In John's vision of the future world, he hears a loud voice thunder from the throne of

God. “There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain.” The entire order of our present world will pass away. The very fabric of our broken planet with cancer and corruption, divorce and despair, poverty and pollution will be done away with.

### **Illustration**

In his book, *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn writes about the new earth God will create. He compiles a compelling list of what won’t be there.

*“No death, no suffering. No funeral homes, abortion clinics, or psychiatric wards. No rape, missing children, or drug rehabilitation centers. No bigotry, no muggings or killings. No worry or depression or economic downturns. No wars, no unemployment. No anguish over failure and miscommunication. No con men. No locks. No death. No mourning. No pain. No boredom.*

*“No arthritis, no handicaps, no cancer, no taxes, no bills, no computer crashes, no weeds, no bombs, no drunkenness, no traffic jams and accidents, no septic-tank backups. No mental illness... that will be heaven.”*

— Randy Alcorn *Heaven Booklet: Biblical Answers to Common Questions*, page 35

So, how does anticipation of heaven change our lives here below? If we can keep in mind that everything that causes us grief here on earth will be healed in heaven, that gives us an eternal perspective that helps us to endure what we’re going through.

### **Timeless Principle**

Instead of feeling despair about our situation, we can hold onto the truth that everything in this world is temporary. It’s such a comfort to anticipate the day when God will bring healing where there’s sickness, wholeness where there’s division, joy where there’s pain, and life out of death.

### **Conclusion**

In the first chapter of our Bible, we read that God created our world and pronounced everything good. Then sin separated us from God. everything good. Then sin separated us from God.

The world we live in now is beautiful, yet broken. Something seems to be wrong with everything. Something is wrong with every job, in every school, in every marriage.

Something is broken in every relationship, in every church, in every heart.

The whole scope of the Bible reveals God's plan to win back a world in rebellion. Through Jesus, the creator enters the planet and suffers on our behalf. Here, at the end of our journey of faith, we find ourselves back at the beginning...living in an exhilaratingly perfect heavenly world, experiencing unbroken fellowship with our creator king, having all of our hurts and pain and suffering healed and perfected.

Do you long to be there? Prepare now to live forever in God's presence, and develop an eternal perspective on your pain and heartache here on earth, knowing all will be healed someday.

### **Creative Teaching Tool**

End by having the congregation sing a hymn that spans the story of Scripture, from creation to salvation to Revelation: *How Great Thou Art*.