

What will heaven be like?

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[0 : 00] In this chapter, of course, that looks at something we might say, a glimpse of a little of what heaven is like. Well, I want to just look for a wee while at some of the things that the Lord has revealed to us about what heaven is like.

We can't know all the detail for sure. It's rather like the equivalent of, say, reading a book about a place as opposed to going there yourself.

Obviously, I remember the one and only trip I've ever made to the Holy Land. How seeing simply the contours of the land and a Kidron Valley beside Jerusalem and so on, even though Jerusalem's all a modern city now.

And Galilee is surrounded by, effectively, tourist resort hotels and so on. You can still stand on the hills and get the sense of the lake and the hillsides and look at the maps again in your Bible and say, Well, yes, now I know where that is. Now I know the sense of it.

But in one sense, until you go, you can't make sense of all the descriptions. And we won't be able to make full sense of all the descriptions of heaven until we have been there.

[1 : 09] And then I suppose it won't matter much then what was written and revealed down here. But it is good for us to know what we can know. What will heaven be like?

We have only glimpses from God's Word. But such glimpses as he gives, he wants us to know. He wants to reveal to us. He could easily have said, look, it's just going to be brilliant.

Just trust me. I don't have to tell you anymore. But he chooses instead to reveal to us. Not only how he will deal with things in the last days, which is most of what Revelation is about, but also of heaven itself, of which we have a glimpse or two revealed to us.

One of perhaps the striking things that we read in verse 1 of this chapter 21, it says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.

Why do we need a new heaven and a new earth? Okay, we might say, well, we'll understand why we need a new earth. Because, you know, this one's fallen and it's in sin and under the curse.

[2 : 14] But why do we need a new heaven? Well, this is not an old idea. God has revealed this already way back in Isaiah 65, where we read at verse 17, For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind.

But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and our people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people.

And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. Now, if Jerusalem is going to be a joy to the Lord, it can't be the old Jerusalem, which had so much sin and idolatry and warfare in it.

So this is one reason why we have a new Jerusalem that is spoken of here. Why do we need the new heaven and the new earth? Well, remember what Job says.

Job, almost certainly the oldest written book of the Bible. I know obviously the events at the beginning of Genesis describe earlier material, the creation and so on.

[3 : 23] But these, the Lord has inspired Moses to write down. And Moses came an awful long time after Job. So Job is almost certainly the oldest book in the Bible.

And here we read at chapter 15, at verse 15, Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints. Yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.

Why is heaven not clean in his sight? Well, there's nothing wrong with heaven as it is just now. But what heaven as it is just now is, certainly is symbolic of separation between God and man.

Remember how at the beginning God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. God's dwelling was with man to begin with. And then sin entered into the world. And when sin entered into the world, there was separation.

Man was cast out in the garden. The cherubim with a flaming sword that turned every way was guarding it. Man could no longer dwell with God. God withdrew from man's presence.

[4 : 26] So there comes this separation between heaven and earth. And although heaven is still perfect, yet the old heaven is symptomatic of that separation between God and man.

Now there is a difference, of course. There is a distinction with the new heaven and the new earth as well. Because in the old heaven as well, of course, it's true. But in the old earth, even when man is created sinless, he was created sinless but with the possibility of sinning.

Adam was given complete free will. He could theoretically, and then he did in practice, sin, even though he was made perfect. Once man is redeemed and gets to heaven, there is no longer any possibility of sinning.

That's one distinction between the two. That in heaven there is no possibility of sinning. Now some would say, well then, Adam was just under a probationary period on earth.

And to see if he would fall or not, I'm not entirely comfortable myself with that. It's more like in terms of if you're flying in a plane, there's a risk you might fall out.

[5 : 36] But then once you have fallen out, and if you've got a parachute or whatever, and finally you come down to the ground, there's no longer any risk of falling out, because you've done it. You've fallen out. You've landed on the ground.

In heaven, every single redeemed soul in heaven has already sinned. They've already been redeemed. They've already been saved. They've, as it were, reached safety.

There's no longer any possibility of falling. In the same way as once you've got down to the ground, there's no longer any possibility of falling out of the airplane. It may be great to be up there, but you can fall out, but you can stay in it.

Adam in his perfect state, he could sin or he might stay perfect. But once you've sinned, once you've fallen, then if you're redeemed and saved by Christ, as every soul in heaven will be, they'll only be saved by Christ, no other way to be saved.

They've already died to sin. They've already fallen. They've already been redeemed. There's no longer any other possibility of sinning. Heaven, therefore, will be perfection. But even perfection, if it is symptomatic of separation, God is less than perfectly pleased with that old way of things.

[6 : 48] It is perfect in a sense, but it could be complete in its perfection if there is a new heaven and a new earth. This is what he says he's going to do. Why there's no more sea?

Well, we don't know that exactly. We think of the sea as something good, something positive and nice, but it may be, again, that bearing in mind that for the Jews, the sea was symptomatic or a symbol of chaos, of that which you couldn't control, of that which was threatening, people drowned in it, ships were destroyed by it, you know, you couldn't plow it, you couldn't fence it, you couldn't do anything with it.

It was untamable. And maybe there is that sense in it, or maybe it is simply that the sea was that which separated between nations. And if there's no more sea, that all the nations that are redeemed are all part of one heavenly country.

Maybe, again, we can only speculate. But it says, I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepares a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

[8 : 04] No more death, or sorrow, or crying, any more pain, for the former things are passed away. Behold, and make all things new. Write, for these words are true and faithful.

So, if this is happening as John sees it, then, who is he writing for? Well, if this is happening in a sense of eternity, it is happening out with time.

John is being told to write these things down for those who are still dwelling within the realm of time, so that they may see a glimpse of eternity.

You don't write down things that are not meant to be preserved. You don't write down things unless they're meant for a wider audience than just who you can tell by word of mouth.

And you don't write things down unless, A, they are true, if God is saying it. Anyway, these words are true and faithful. And B, unless it is meant to be permanent. This is meant to be a permanent record of the truth of what God has revealed.

[9 : 06] Behold, the tabernacle of God is with man. And this is another feature, in fact, perhaps it's the most important feature, if we're looking at a glimpse of what heaven is like. Heaven is all about the glory of God.

God has revealed his glory in creation. He's revealed it in the earth. He's revealed it in the heavens. He's revealed it in the sea and on the land and the creatures. And in man made in his image, male and female.

But man has defiled that image. The world is not as God created it as the first. There is dis-ease. There is dislocation. There is war.

There is hatred. There is murder. There is killing and bloodshed. That's not how God created the world. But the world as God created it was meant to glorify him. Heaven glorifies him.

And the new heavens and the new earth are all about the glory of God. We enter into that glory. We are enabled to become part of that glory by grace.

[10 : 05] Our sin is forgiven and washed away. But it's ultimately all about God and his glory. Now, this is something that we need to really take to heart because there's so much nonsense out there in the world about how so-called heaven is portrayed.

Oh, when I get up there, you know, I'm going to be sitting right by playing my little heart. Or if there be a musician, it'll just be one big ongoing concert. No, it won't be.

And if there are a golfer, I'm just going to be out there in that great big golf course in the sky. No, you're not. It's none of it. It's all just a replication of earth with all its failures, with all its faults, with all its vanity, with all its sin.

I don't know what hell is going to be like, except it's going to be a place completely without God. We're told a little glimpse of what hell is like, but it would be perfect poetic justice if hell ended up being for each individual person what you thought you wanted to do.

And you had to do it and do it and do it and do it and do it and do it for all eternity, indulging what you thought was your greatest desire and vanity. And this is what yours is made to do and do and do and do and do.

[11 : 22] And it's not heaven anymore. Suddenly it's hell. Because hell is a place without God. Hell is a place where the comfortable presence of God does not go.

Heaven is all about God. It's not about doing everything I thought I wanted to do and doing it without interruption for all time. It's not about indulging all my appetites.

It's not as some religions would have. They're just a great big indulgence of the flesh and one great big fleshly party up there. It is about God.

It is about his purity, his holiness, his perfection. And those who love him and who return the love that he has for them, they dwell with him, rejoicing in his glory, rejoicing in his blessing.

And I think, well, that doesn't sound terribly exciting, does it? I mean, where's the benefit for me? The only way we think like that is because we don't yet know the Lord.

[12 : 23] The little we know of the Lord, the more we desire to love him and be with him. As we come to know him more, we desire more of him, such that when a seed of the Lord is on their deathbed, it is because the Lord has ripened them for glory and they are ready then to be with him for all eternity.

Now it says nothing that will be filed will get in there. Now fearful and unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And verse 27, there shall no wise end through anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie. But they which are written in the Lamb's book of life, think, well, that's most of us done for, isn't it?

No, because we've all done bad things. If we haven't physically done them, and Jesus says if you even think about doing it, well, that's just as bad as doing it in practice. So, you know, we've pretty much all had it now, haven't we?

That's why you have a saying here. That's why God sent his beloved son, Jesus, to take sinners like us, to wash away their sin in his own precious blood, that most costly sacrifice, that most costly price that has ever been paid, so that souls who were sinners are made saints.

[13 : 51] Saints are not people who never do a thing wrong. Saints are people who belong to Christ. They stumble, they fall, they have imperfections, but their sins are covered, washed by the blood of Christ.

So nothing that defiles enters in there, because the sin that we would bring into heaven is washed away by the blood of Christ. And the desire that we have is more and more turned from desire for the things of the world, as that gradually withers and perishes and is replaced by the blossoming, embodying and fruit-bearing love for Christ.

So that fills more and more of us. But you see, when you think, oh, well, maybe it won't work out, maybe it's all fake, I don't know if I can trust this, so I'll hold back.

If we are fearful, fear the world more than we fear the Lord, that's a guarantee of lostness. That's what it says in verse 8, the fearful, the unbelieving, as well as the abominable and murderers and homomongers and sorcerers and so on.

There's only one place for us if we're not in heaven, and that's hell. And the ultimate deprivation of hell is not fire and brimstone and lakes and so on that burn with fire.

[15:05] All that will be there, because the Bible says it will. But the worst aspect of hell will be an eternity without God. And the most glorious aspect of heaven is an eternity with the Lord.

It is all about Him. If you read through this chapter 21, see how frequently there is reference to God or the Lamb or the Lamb's Book of Life or whatever, you know, almost every verse has God in it somewhere, because it is all about Him.

There came unto me then one of the seven angels which had the seven vials from the seven last plagues and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her lamp was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

And then we have the description of it. A wall great and high, twelve gates, and the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon which had the names of the twelve tribes and the children of Israel.

[16:19] And each gate, each side, three gates, and the wall of the city of twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Now remember the foundations of the apostles, and remember what Paul writes to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 20.

Therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

Now, we might think, oh yeah, well John's just taken what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he's just given it a wee spin, and he's adding it in here. And the twelve tribes of Israel, well, you know, they just say, oh, twelve tribes of Israel, oh, twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Let's just pretend this is all equal kind of thing. No, it's not a case of thinking things, oh, let's just add this bit in. It's rather a case of what we see in Revelation, and what we see particularly in its conclusion, is the consummation of all things.

The reason there are twelve apostles, yes, is to reflect the twelve tribes of Israel. Why did God choose twelve tribes of Israel? Well, we can't answer that. We just know that this number is precious and special to him.

[17:31] And likewise, if we take the dimensions of the city, twelve thousand furlongs, and a thousand was the biggest unit of counting that the Hebrews tended to use.

So, twelve times a thousand furlongs. A furlong was the unit of measurement, an eighth of a mile if you're plowing a furrow in a field. If you translate that into our measurements, a furlong, an eighth of a mile, so twelve thousand, that makes fifteen hundred miles.

We're going to get the dimensions of the Holy City. It is fifteen hundred miles long, fifteen hundred miles broad. That means it's two million, two hundred and fifty thousand square miles.

There's going to be plenty of room in there, isn't there? And we think, oh, how will heaven not be full up? There'll be loads of room. Loads of room in heaven, loads of room in the Holy City, and there's all the rest of heaven as well.

It is perfection. That's what's being described here. As long, as broad, and as it is high. You can't improve upon the dimensions.

[18:37] This is a perfect description. And he measured the wall. They have 144 cubits, according to the measure of a man. 216 feet thick are the walls.

The building of the wall was a jasper. The city was pure gold, like under clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. And then

we've got a list of the precious stones.

Now, where else do we get a list of the precious stones? We get a list of precious stones in the breastplate, which the high priest wore, and when he entered into the tabernacle.

Exodus 39, we read from verse 9, the breastplate, it was four square, just like the new city, the holy city, Jerusalem. They made the breastplate double.

A span was the length of the breadthrope being doubled, and they set in it four rows of stones, and then the list of the precious stones. And they don't exactly correspond.

[19 : 36] Eight out of the twelve are exactly the same. The sardonyx and onyx are almost certainly the same. But there's four that don't match, but almost certainly, given that eight out of the twelve, are an exact match.

It probably just means that the other ones, it's just that they've been given different names now in the New Testament in the Greek thousands of years later than the names that they were given in the Old Testament way back in Exodus.

It is the same principle, this perfection, four square, precious stones, everything that was revealed already is pointing to the ultimate fulfillment.

What the Lord is doing in Ephesians, what he's doing in Isaiah, what he's doing in Exodus, he's gathering it all up together so that when everything is concluded and completed in glory and in heaven, that's where that did fit in.

That's what that was all about. That's where that did all came together. And what we will find is not only everything that the Lord has revealed has purpose and meaning and sense in it, but also every aspect of your life, if you are in Christ, will be found to have its place, its own stitch, in the tapestry.

[20 : 53] You see, it's not like if somebody like me was to take an engine apart in a garage and then try and fit it back together again. Well, I wouldn't get very far, but let's say I did fit it all back together again and try, oh, look, it's running, that's fine.

So they say, oh, you've done really well with that. What are all these bits left over? Well, these are the bits I couldn't find where they went. And it still seems to go okay, but there's all these bits left over. No, it's not going to be like this at all. If it's done right, all these bits will have their place.

And all the aspects and portions and details, not only of salvation history, but of life itself will have their place, their purpose, their exact spot in God's perfect scheme of salvation.

All the precious stones, all the four-square breastplate of the high priest symbolizing the four-square perfection of the new Jerusalem. everything has its detail.

The new heavens and the new earth revealed to Isaiah, hinted at by Job, revealed now to John that it might be written down for the church.

[22 : 03] And we read here, the city had no need of the sun, neither the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten everything. Well, how can there possibly be any light if there isn't any sun or moon? Well, what was it for the first four days in creation?

God said, let there be light, and there was light. But he didn't make the sun or the moon or the stars to what was it, day four or something? Or farther on down through creation. Where does the light come from when God says, let there be light?

It comes from himself. So if he doesn't need it in the first creation, he's not going to need it in the new creation. These are things that he makes to be part of the world he gives us.

But he doesn't need them in heaven. The glory of God did lighten it. And the land was the light thereof. And we might think, oh yes, well our light is pretty good.

We want to keep what we've got. But you know, if you're in the depths of winter and you've got a power cut, then you might be very glad of, you know, half a dozen candles in the house.

[23 : 02] You go through them and you go into your bedroom or you go to different rooms of the house, you're very glad of that candle because without the candle, it's pitch black. And if you have to go outside at all, shield the candle or take the killing lamp or whatever, you're very glad of the light of that lamp because there's no electricity, power cuts, everything pitch black.

But then say the next day dawns and it's bright sunshine, maybe the power's still off but it's beautiful sun-filled sky. You're not still going to be going around with your wee candle, are you? You're not still going to be going around with your lamp because the sun fills the sky.

Any light that your wee candle can give, it looks pathetic. It's drowned out by the light that is coming from heaven itself. So likewise, whatever light the sun or the moon can give compared to the light of the glory of God, it's like a little candle in broad daylight.

It says nothing. You don't need it anymore. Half the things we think we need here, we're not going to need there. The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it.

Now this is a fascinating aspect. You know, the nations, that's the people groups of them which are saved. Now I don't know if this means, well, here's all the people who were saved who are Scottish, here's all the Irish ones, here's the English, the Africans, the French, you know, and all those from these different countries.

[24 : 20] Here you all are in their old people groupings now. The nations, these are the saved from amongst all these nations. And yes, they came from these lands and they spoke those languages, but it doesn't matter now because they're all one in Christ and they're all in glory.

Maybe it'll be like that. I don't know. Or maybe it'll simply be the Lord divides us up into new people groups. That's not what is important. What is important is the nations of them which are saved is the fact that they are saved.

Whether we still have our Scottish, English, Irish, French, Welsh identity, I don't know. Probably, I would think we might do because it's part of who we are and the Lord doesn't want to turn us all into faceless robots who are exactly the same.

He delights in the diversity, the beauty, the wonder of what he has created. When we have our resurrection bodies we'll still be recognisable as who we are.

Our redeemed souls are still recognisable as who we are. So probably our old identities will still be recognisable. But here's the thing, the kings of the earth would bring their glory and honour into it.

[25 : 27] Now, there's not going to be many kings and glorious men in heaven because we're told that. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul writes to the Corinthians For ye see your calling, brethren, that not many wise men among you after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen.

Yea, and things which are not to bring to naught things that are that no flesh should glory in his presence. So there won't be many kings in glory but there'll be some.

You know, there'll be good and godly kings. You know, there'll be Alfred, the king of the Saxons in England who was a Christian king. There were Christian kings occasionally in Scotland and David was obviously a king.

Solomon, others, those who were high, mighty men of God. There were some but there aren't many. And one reason there aren't many is because when we get a little power ourselves that corrupts our relationship with the Lord.

[26 : 43] And we want to preserve our own power at all costs rather than giving it to the Lord. It's not for nothing that Psalm 2 says, the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.

He that's sitting in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. If the light of the sun is as nothing compared to the light of the glory of God, what are the power of petty kings and presidents and prime ministers and powerful men and women in this world compared to the power of God?

They don't even hold power in their own countries for that long. You know, how long does your average monarch reign? Okay, our own gracious queen is an exception.

Reign longer than anybody else but most people, that's still only 60 something years. Nobody reigns for 100 years. no dictator, no president, no prime minister. They don't last even their own lifetimes because they're not king or whatever for their own lifetimes.

How long have you got? How much power do you exercise? What is the strength of your own little country that you rule over? Over against the power of God. So the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it.

[28 : 09] The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. So those kings who are saved those kings who are redeemed what is the glory and the honour that they bring?

Well, they're not going to be bringing, here's my crown jewels or here's my sword here's my flag here's the trumpet that I blew in that battle here's all the victories that I won over these other nations.

These things are not going to impress God. What is the glory of these kingdoms? Well, I would suggest to you that we have a hint both earlier in Revelation in chapter 4 verses 4 and then 10 where we read round about the throne were 4 and 20 seats and upon the seats I saw 4 and 20 elders sitting clothed in white raiment they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Now, if they had got these crowns in heaven they must have been given them by the Lord. But then we read the 4 and 20 elders in verse 10 of chapter 4 Fall down before him that sat him on the throne and worship him that liveth forever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne saying Thou art worthy O Lord to receive glory and honour and power for Thou hast created all things for Thy pleasure they are and were created.

Even those in heaven who wear crowns throw their crowns at the feet of the Lamb of the risen Christ. But what is then the glory the joy that the crown of kings of the earth or of crowned elders what is their glory?

[29 : 41] Well, I would suggest to you again a good a wee hint in some of Paul's letters not least here in Thessalonians in chapter 2 where we look at verse 19 and 20 For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing?

Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ that is coming? For ye are our glory and joy. That will be the glory of the kings of the earth.

What did they do for the Lord? Who did they serve for the Lord? What did they bring to the Lord? How did they rule their nation for the Lord?

What did they do for Him? How did they benefit others? Paul can say to the Thessalonians you are our glory and our crown because you have believed through our testimony that glorifies our witness. It glorifies the message that we are bringing. It glorifies our task because you are the fruit of our task. You are the glory the crown the joy of what we do. So whatever the kings of the earth bring it cannot be their kingdoms.

[30 : 49] It cannot be their victories in battle. It cannot be the wealth of their nation because God is not impressed with such things. The streets of the city are made of pure gold and we've got here he doesn't need extra bits of pavement.

What he desires is that we bring to him true glory true crowning joys our work and service for him. That which we bring what did we do what did we benefit others in the service of Christ?

This is what we bring this is the glory of the nations the glory and honour of the nations remember it's the nations of them which are saved which are redeemed it will be their witness their testimony it will be the fruit of their labours for the Lord the fruit of their witness if they were amongst those of whom we read who were chapter 20 who were beheaded for the name of Christ then their blood will be part of their testimony part of their witness part of their glory and crown of what they offered suffered did for the Lord they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that be violent neither whatsoever make it abomination or make it a lie now all the saints of the Lord will have been guilty of these things but they are washed but they are cleansed and those things have been absorbed and taken upon Christ himself upon the cross and put to death there so there is nothing left but purity nothing left but faithfulness they which are written in the Lamb's book of life you see it's all brought together in the consummation every drop of blood shed by the Lord's people every little act of service done every good deed on the Lord's behalf committed every cup of cold water offered in the name of Christ all the service that is rendered this is the glory this is the crown this is all gathered up and brought and presented into the treasure house of the new Jerusalem all of your life will not only have quality in Jesus but it will have purpose and if we are in Christ then the day will come of the consummation we will see where every little bit of suffering fitted in where every teardrop had its place where every action indeed that we we may have done it and then forgot anything about it but it may have done good to somebody else and perhaps we never knew how much good it did how much we lifted somebody's spirit by something we did or something we said every piece of the jigsaw will have its place every stitch in the tapestry every drop of water in the reservoir it will all have its place all have its purpose all have its perfection and it will be gathered up into that perfection and made pure in Christ if we are in him then it all has purpose it all has fulfillment and it all has its consummation this is a glimpse of something of what heaven is like what is perfect you you you