

Heaven Can't Wait • Revelation 21:1-22:6 • By Dr. David O. Dykes. Part 28
Revelation: Unveiling the Truth

INTRODUCTION

I want to talk to you about a very special subject close to my heart. The older I get, the more friends and loved ones who go to this place, and the more special it is to me. And that place is heaven. You ought to be interested in heaven if you're a Christian and want to learn as much as you can about where you're going to spend eternity. We're taking another group this summer to the Crimea. And before we go on this trip, we're meeting every week, studying, and preparing and praying and planning. We want to learn as much as we can about the people, the climate, and the scenery so that when we get there, we'll feel more at home.

If you've been born again, you're going to go to heaven, so I hope you want to learn something about it. Now you might not be in a rush to get there. A Sunday school teacher asked the children in her class, "How many of you boys and girls want to go to heaven?" And everybody except one little boy raised their hand. And 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."

Revelation 20:15 marks the end of all the statements about judgment and punishment. "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." But look at what the next verse says in 21:1-8

"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 (nothing that separates). 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 man. 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 away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more 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. It is finished. *Tetelestai*. I am the alpha and 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 of this and I'll be his God. And he will be my son, my child. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic

arts...they are dogs...Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Let's talk about heaven. Let's talk about, 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 that the old heaven and the old earth had passed away. We have no frame of reference with which to compare it. So you just have to imagine that it's absolutely new because that's what Jesus says. “Behold, I make all things new....”

These first eight verses in chapter 21 form the description of new Jerusalem, the capital city of the eternal kingdom of God. The city is not all there is to heaven. It's not all there is to the new heaven and the new earth. It's just the capital city of it, but it's one part of it. Now, please understand that in the scriptures, the New and Old Testament, when the word “heaven” appears, it can be used to describe three things, all using the same word. There's the first heaven, which just speaks to the atmosphere, the sky. The Bible speaks of the birds that fly in the heavens. And so that's one use of the word “heaven.” The second use of the word “heaven” in the Bible means cosmic space because the Bible says, “When I consider the heavens, the works of thy hands...” it's talking about the stars, the moon, space. That's the second heaven. But then the third use of the word “heaven” is the dwelling place of God.

Whenever you read the word “heaven” in the Bible, make the distinction between the three. There are not “seven heavens.” I don't know where that expression came from. The Bible doesn't talk about that. However, Paul does say in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 that “a man in Christ” was caught up into the “third heaven” and saw things. We believe it was Paul, but he doesn't make it clear who it was. 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 that God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble because he was so ego-inflated. He said that he needed this thorn in the flesh.

This is why in Philippians 1:21, he writes, “For me to live is Christ, but to die, that's gain.” He says, “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.” Once you catch a glimpse of this third heaven, that will also be the desire of your heart to want to go there like Paul did. I'm ready. I desire to go, but I'll wait until it is God's time for me to go.

How is this heaven described? Let's notice three things about heaven in this first section.

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

1. Heaven's preparation (21:1-3)

Jesus said in John 14, "In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Jesus is the master carpenter, and it's exciting to think that for the last 2000 years he has been in heaven preparing a place for you. Now that's one analogy. But look at the analogy that John uses here in Revelation 21. He says, "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down prepared as a bride..."

There is hardly anything more beautiful than a bride prepared for her husband—dressed up, makeup, and hair fixed. When I officiate at a wedding, the doors open and the bride comes to the doorway and I glance at her. But then I always glance over at the groom. I want to see his face and the expressions that radiate from him because there's just something about seeing that bride. I have never seen an ugly bride. I've seen one or two that came close, but I've never seen an ugly bride. There's no such thing. I remember 20 years ago when I saw Cindy walking down that aisle. And I suppose I've never seen anything as beautiful as I saw that night. The preacher said, "Wilt thou?" And I just wilted right there in front of everybody.

When John sees heaven, he says it's like a bride who has been prepared for her husband. She has sacrificed everything. She has gone to all manner of costs to prepare herself for her husband. John said, "That's how pretty it is going to be."

2. Heaven's peace (21:4)

This is one of my favorite verses in the scripture. Chapter 21:4 describes the calm, the peacefulness of heaven. It says God is going to wipe away every tear from their eyes at this point. Were there tears before then? I don't know. Perhaps someone that you loved and wanted to be saved was not saved. Perhaps a Christian realized that you could have done so much more for Christ or that you didn't do much with the gifts that you were given. That may cause you grief. But whatever happens up to this point, the Bible says, at this point God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

I love a Bible where there is no devil in the first two chapters, and there's no devil in the last two chapters. He's completely done away with! The first tears after Cain killed Abel in Genesis 2 were probably shed by Adam and Eve, who must have wept bitter tears. There has been a trail of tears throughout history. And I suppose everybody at one time or another has cried for one reason or another: disappointment, heartache, pain, and grief. But a time is going to come when God will wipe away all the tears of every person. He says there will be no more need to cry, no more need to weep.

I love the things that *aren't* going to be in heaven. As much as we're going to look at the things that are going to be in heaven, there are not going to be any tears. There will be no more death. When Cain killed his brother Abel, it marked the first death. And since that time, there has been a long funeral progression of person after person dying, being buried, dying, being buried, dying, being buried. And the same thing that could be said about crying could be said about death. I suppose everybody at one time or another has been touched by death. And if you haven't yet, hang on, you will be. The time will come when you'll stand at an open casket, and you'll look down into the face of some loved one. Someone in your family. There will be pain. But not in heaven. There will be no cemeteries. There will be no funerals. There will be no death.

There will not be any more pain in heaven either. Some people live with pain almost constantly and take medication regularly because of some recurring, nagging, chronic pain. There is also emotional pain—the pain of rejection, failure, and disappointment. Pain is a part of this existence, but I get excited about a place where there will be no more death, crying, mourning, or pain. Heaven is going to be a place of tranquility.

3. Heaven's population (21:6-8)

Who will not be in heaven? The Bible tells us who will not be in heaven. Chapter 21 verse eight says the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the adulterous, all liars...they won't be there. Verse 27 of that same chapter says nothing “impure” will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. You want to know who is going to be there? Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Are there places here on earth that you'd be a little afraid to walk at night? Maybe downtown Dallas or New York City? Why? Criminals, like drug addicts/drug abusers (the word for “magic arts” is the word is “pharmakeia” to describe drug abuse) rapists, robbers, and thieves. Those people are here on earth, 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 in heaven.

Now look at that list. You'd expect the murderers to be there and the sexually immoral. The liars, the idolaters—you expect them to be there. But the cowardly? That could be speaking of someone who wanted to accept Christ but was afraid to take a stand for Christ. They were 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 unbelievers will not be there. It could be a man or a woman, a teenager, who comes to church and sings the songs, but they just never got around to trusting Jesus Christ. They're a good person. They're a moral person. They're a kind and loving person, but they just never trusted Jesus Christ. The Bible says they're going to be categorized with all of these evil folks. And so who's going to be there? 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 the disciples and told them to cast out demons, to heal in his name? Those disciples came back, and the Bible says they were rejoicing. I mean, they were turning somersaults! They said, "Lord, we're so happy because even the demons are subject to us in your name!"

And Jesus said, "Don't rejoice because demons are subject to you. But rather rejoice because your names are written down in the Book of Life in heaven." That's something that you can celebrate every day. 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, made a hotel reservation, and then when you get there to the check-in desk, they can't find your name? They look at the computer screen and say, "We don't have a reservation in that name." And you say, "What happened?"

What a desolate feeling it is to have made a trip and suddenly realize you may not have a place to stay. There is one reservation you need to be absolutely certain you have made. And that is your reservation in heaven. And your confirmation number is JOHN316. "For God loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that who so ever believes trust in him shall have everlasting life."

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

John goes into very minute details in Revelation 21:9-27.

"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. 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, 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. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. 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 agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, 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 gold, as pure as 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. 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.”

I can remember as a child hearing songs about streets of gold and pearly gates. Have you heard that? Well, that's where it comes from right here in this passage. I told my mother when I was a little preschooler, “When you bury me, put a pick and an axe in the coffin because I want to dig up those streets of gold.” I didn’t understand what the song was talking about! What John is using here is human language to try to describe what is indescribable beauty. He's taking earthly jewels and earthly metals like gold and pearl and silver to describe something that's unbelievably beautiful.

1. The magnificent beauty (21:9-13)

John says the city shines like a glorious jewel, as clear as crystal, with streets of gold that are like transparent glass. That's nothing that we could ever even

imagine! It's so beautiful. I'm colorblind, and the whole time I was growing up, I had to have my mother pick all my clothes for me. When I went off the college, it was pretty rough for a while. I remember sitting up on the platform at a church getting ready to preach, not realizing I had on one green sock and one brown sock. I didn't know it, but somebody came up to me after the service and said, "Did you know that you've got on one green sock and one brown sock?" And I immediately knew what I'd done. I said, "Yeah, I've got another pair just like it back at college." And I can appreciate a rainbow, but I can only really see two different shades in a rainbow. So I'm going to enjoy heaven more than most people because, in heaven, I'm not going to be colorblind. And all the beauty described here is going to mean something more to me.

I read a true story about a little boy who had a sight impairment. He was blind for the first 10 years of his life. But because of medical technology and advancements, some surgeons felt like that there was a surgery they could perform that could restore his eyesight. When the nurses removed the bandages after the surgery, for the first time he looked up into the face of his physician. Then he looked over at the face of his mother. Then he ran to the window of the hospital, looked outside and he said, "Oh, mother. Why didn't you tell me it was so beautiful?"

Can you imagine the sensory overload that somebody like that must have experienced? Get ready, because I think when we get to heaven, we're going to be so overwhelmed that we're going to say Revelation 21 never even came close to describing the beauty of it.

2. The massive size (21:15-21)

Some of you who are math whizzes can take 1400 miles, multiply by 1400 miles, multiplied by 1400 miles again. And you get like three billion cubic miles. It's amazing the size of this one city. Some people think maybe it has different layers and levels. Who knows? And some people think that in heaven it's going to be very crowded. Let's imagine there may be about three billion people in heaven. Each person would have 40 square miles of space to themselves. We're talking about a huge city! The city goes all the way from New York to Miami, all the way across the United States, back up to Denver and back all the way across. That's just one capital city of the new heaven and the new earth. When God does something, he does it big.

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

Revelation 22:1-6 says, “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 who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’”

1. River of life (22:1-2)

First of all, notice what John says about the river of life. Now here's the picture. He said that there is a great street that goes the length of the city for 1400 miles. It's a street of gold named Hallelujah Avenue or whatever you want to call it. But right in the middle of that boulevard is a river. It's a river of life and the water is crystal clear. And did you notice what Jesus said earlier? “I invite you to come to the water of life. I will give it freely to him that is thirsty. I will give it to him to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” Jesus is not going to charge you a penny. He says, “I've already paid the price for this beautiful river of life.”

During my last year of college, Cindy and I were married, and I worked at a church about 75 miles away from Birmingham where I went to school. Every Wednesday night I would drive down there and back. And every Friday I would drive down and come back on Sunday night. This was a time before FM radio so we would listen to an AM station in New Orleans. There was a song that they played every Sunday night at the same time by a quartet. The song was four exits long on the Interstate. The chorus said, “There is a river that flows from the throne of God.” This water they sang about is for nourishment and for refreshment and cleansing.

2. Tree of life (22:2)

What do you picture when I say, “tree of life”? You picture one tree standing there. But the Bible says on *each side* of the river stood the tree of life. One tree can't stand on both sides of the river. This is using that term “tree” generically. We would say the pine tree is indigenous to East Texas. But we're not talking about one tree. We're talking about many trees. And so here's the picture. This river of

life flowing in the middle of this great street has intervals of Trees of Life on both banks. What do they look like? We don't know, but we know they are fruit trees because the Bible says every month they bear their fruit.

I don't know about you, but I kind of like the idea that we're going to be eating for eternity. You know, angels ate with Abraham in the Old Testament. Jesus in his resurrected body went to the Upper Room with the disciples and ate with them, and then even fixed breakfast with them one time. So we're going to be eating in heaven. And this tree of life, the fruit, is for nourishment. But notice that the text says the leaves there are for the "health of the nations." In heaven, you won't grow old. You won't grow tired. You won't grow ill because the health from God will be in the leaves of the tree. In verse four, it says we 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. God has blessed us beyond the angels because we are his precious children, his saints, his chosen ones.

CONCLUSION

We are going to serve him for all eternity. But what makes heaven "heaven" is not the gates of pearl. It's not streets of gold; it is not a tree. It's not a river. The thing that makes heaven "heaven" is Jesus. Did you know that? It's 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 would be. When I leave home on a revival or on a trip or something and 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 look at the silver and caress it. No, 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, right? And heaven is heaven because Jesus is there.

Have you ever heard of Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer? This is what she wrote about the glories of heaven. I want you to remember a blind woman wrote these words.

When my lifework 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.

I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,

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I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the print of the nails in His hand.

Oh, the soul-thrilling rapture when I view His blessed face,
And the luster of His kindly beaming eye;
How my full heart will praise Him for the mercy, love and grace,
That prepare for me a mansion in the sky.

Oh, the dear ones in glory, how they beckon me to come,
And our parting at the river I recall;
To the sweet vales of Eden they will sing my welcome home;
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

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

When you get to heaven, as much as you think you'd like to see that loved one who's died, that's not who you're 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."

Heaven is real. It's a prepared place. Do you know that? Do you know, that you know, that you know you have your reservation there? You can be sure, if you've said yes to Jesus.

OUTLINE

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

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