

Heaven Bound 3: The Church

(8/9/26)

TODAY **we bring everything full circle.**

For two weeks, *we explored the concept of Heaven*...the New Jerusalem. We discovered:

- It's the original version of earthly Jerusalem...the earthly city is an imperfect copy of the heavenly.
- It has 12 gates and each gate has a massive pearl attached to it.
- An angel stands guard at each gate like the Gatekeepers here at Church.
- The gates are always open, but nothing evil or demonic can enter there. There is no sin, fear, curse, insecurity, pain, sorrow, or conflict there.
- There's no need for artificial or natural light, for Jesus IS the Light.
- The streets and walls are paved with the purest gold, and there are 12 types of precious gems placed everywhere.
- The city is 1500 miles long, wide, and high—HUGE!

Why would Jesus do all this? Build this incredibly opulent city that all the money in the world couldn't possibly pay for? Make it so big that, if you were to lay it out flat, it would roughly be the size of the entire USA?

- He did it for the same reason He created Eden.
- For the same reason He apportioned the Promised Land—Israel—and gathered His people there.
- For the same reason He empowered David to take Jerusalem and construct a Tabernacle there.

God wants all His people together, to live with them.

And He's not cheap. The New Jerusalem is shining and resplendent, like a bride adorned for her husband. **Jesus took great care in her construction, and she reflects HIM.**

Lots of men build things and take pride in their work. When my dad finished our cottage at GH Lake, I remember him saying to me *"my blood, sweat, and tears are in this place. I built it the way I've always dreamed."* My dad built that because he saw his family living with him in it...and we did.

The Lord doesn't want to be separate from us. It's not and never was His intention to remain distanced from us way up in the place called heaven while we languish without Him down here on earth.

The Lord doesn't want us to be separate from each other. In the modern western world, isolation is becoming more popular...but the Lord's will is the opposite. He built the Church to be a community of believers connecting with each other.

Death is the ultimate separator ... so what did Jesus do? He died, on the Cross, in our place. He rose from the dead 3 days later, walking out of that tomb and appearing to hundreds of people. He ascended to heaven, made intercession for us, then sat back down on His throne. At some point in the future, He will stand up from said throne, mount up on a white horse, and return to earth in power and glory.

- Yes, He's coming to unseat the Beast.
- Yes, He's coming to establish His personal rule over the earth.
- Yes, all nations will bend the knee to His Lordship.

The main reason He's coming back is to gather His people together and live with us...to be among us:

[1Jo 3:2 ESV] 2 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.**

[1Co 13:12 ESV] 12 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.

[Rev 22:1-4 ESV] 1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 **They will see his face,** and his name will be on their foreheads.

What's more is this: another name used in the Bible for the 2nd coming is THE GATHERING or THE HARVEST. We, His people, are His harvest. When He comes back, he gathers us together in one place:

[2Th 2:1 ESV] 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him....

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the famous parable of the **wheat vs the tares**. The wheat represent people who believe in Him, and the tares those who have rejected Him. He states that, at the end, He sends out His angels to gather BOTH the wheat and the tares. The wheat—His people—are gathered and brought to His barn where we will “shine like the sun.”

I am so looking forward to all this...but all that lies in our future.

We don't know when all of that will finally happen, *so what do we do until then?*

How does God's plan of living amongst His gathered people move forward?

What does it look like?

Here is the answer: **the Church.**

Last Sunday was our Baptism and I preached a short sermon about being **Baptized INTO something**. First was Moses, then John the Baptist, then Jesus.

We are Baptized—immersed in way over our heads!—to Jesus!

There was one part I left out:

[1Co 12:12-13 ESV] 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, **are one body**, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized **into one body**--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The body Paul is talking about is the Church.

God gathered Adam & Eve in Eden where He walked among them.

For the Hebrew people, **the Lord gathered them together in Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple**. It was the land and city He promised as theirs; He gathered them there and lived among them in the Temple.

Jesus came and brought a better covenant and **made the church into its own nation and people:**

[1Pe 2:9 ESV] 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We often say these verses are spiritual/allegorical and that's true, but now it's time to aim that claim at what it really is: **our new nation is Heaven, the New Jerusalem.**

But we're still asking "what about now?" because the NJ is yet in our future.

The people/nation here on earth is the Church.

- The Church isn't a specific race of people like the Hebrews were.
- The Church doesn't have its own physical land or nation like Israel does.
- The Church doesn't have a specific city like Jerusalem.
- The Church doesn't have a piece of real estate called the Temple Mount or a man-made building like the Temple of old.

While it's true that the Church is wherever Christians are, because we are Jesus' Temple, **God means for THIS [gesture to gathered crowd] to happen.**

One day He will gather us all into the NJ to be together, living with Him...

Right now He gathers us all together to worship, pray, hear His word, and fellowship with each other. Since He dwells within us, He is here...living amongst His people.

Until the day we ascend to Heaven and walk through its gates, **the earthly version of God's plan is the Church.**

- The Church IS Jesus' Body.
- The Church and Jesus are one, just as my head and body are one.
- Jesus LOVES His Church and died for her.

We should do the same.

[Eph 5:25-27 ESV] 25 Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church** and **gave himself up for her**, 26 that he might **sanctify** her, having **cleansed** her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might **present the church to himself in splendor**, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

First, **the church is a HER.** Jesus plays the role of Divine Husband, and we are His wife.

Very similar language used for the NJ...fascinating, don't you think?

Second, **Jesus “gave Himself up” for her** that means more than going to the Cross. Never forget He did an equally big thing by reducing Himself of being God, all powerful sitting on His throne in heaven, to come down here and enter into one of these [gesture at human body].

He didn't descend from heaven in His divine Revelation 1 form with a voice of thunder and fire coming from His eyes, He came here born of a woman like you and I as a regular Jewish Man in the 1st century.

He endured the Cross and death and everything listed in Isaiah 53. Jesus gave up just about everything for the Church and THAT is love!

What was His purpose for giving up Himself? Paul tells us in the rest of the verses: *to get us ready for our wedding!*

- He's bathing us and the clothes He gave us, right now.
- For what reason?
- To present us to HIMSELF. He's making us beautiful to the point of divine shining.

He is the Author and Finisher of our faith and our sanctification.

When your kids were little, did you ever bathe them? Did you do so harshly and angrily, with a steel brush because you were mad they got dirty? Or did you do so lovingly and gently, as a parent who adores their child and wanted them clean?

We may even go roll in the mud every now and then. Yet **our Lord and Savior Jesus isn't washing us in some angry or frustrated fashion.** He's not ironing out the wrinkles in our clothes, or spraying bleach on the spots to make them disappear out of frustration.

He's looking upon us with gentle LOVE, washing us and the clothes He gave us and when He's done, we're going to look marvelous!!!!!!!!!!

Jesus loves the Church and we should too.

Here's what we know: the Church isn't perfect.

- The Church still sins.
- The Church disobeys Jesus.
- The Church has done foolish things in the past.
- There are times when the Church believes wrongly.
- People, perhaps some of you, have been hurt in and by the Church.

While all these are true, **let us never fall into hating, despising, or condescending to her.** Remember the lesson God taught the Apostle Paul:

[Act 9:1-5 ESV] 1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder **against the disciples of the Lord**, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **me**?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

By Acts 9, Jesus had not only risen from the dead but ascended to Heaven. Before this moment, Saul (about to turn into Paul) had never met Jesus face to face. **Yet notice our Lord does NOT say “why are persecuting My people? My body?”**

He says “why are you persecuting ME?” Jesus and His Church are one.

Take a look of Jesus John 17 prayer, the first half of which was about His remaining disciples. **The second half is about His Church:**

[Jhn 17:20-23 ESV] 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for **those who will believe in me through their word**, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that **they also may be in us**, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me **I have given to them**, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 **I in them** and you in me, that they may become **perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and **loved them** even as you loved me.

The Church hasn't been fully bathed yet. We're not quite ready for the heavenly wedding. We still have flaws.

That being said...

- Let us never persecute the church.
- Don't look down on her, separate yourself from her, or feel that you're a cleaner part of her than other parts.
- Don't chop up the church into separate parts such as "the institutional church" or "the religious church" vs "the faithful remnant."

The temptation exists for **Christians to become puffed up (proud)** with Biblical knowledge, systematic doctrine, or their own righteousness.

- Some feel they're pursuing their discipleship more seriously than other Christians.
- Others feel that they've achieved some higher level of maturity.
- I caution you against referring to yourself as "the faithful remnant" which is a reference to Elijah.
- Whenever I hear someone refer to themselves that way, they've already separated themselves from the main Body of Christ and have an air of superiority that's not of God.

Christians like this forget that we're all part of Jesus' Body and they start to see the Church as a dirty, disobedient, and rebellious woman who resembles the Whore of Babylon more than the Bride of Christ.

Jesus loves His Church.

- He loves the part of His Body who prefers rituals, and those who don't.
- He loves the new Christian who has just began their Sanctification, and the elder Christian whose been walking it out for decades.
- He loves the ones who prefer a more organized and orderly service, and those who prefer spontaneity.
- He loves those who like the KJV and those who prefer the NIV.
- He loves those who like to hear old hymns, and those who would rather have something more modern.
- He loves the ones who speak in tongues and the ones who don't.
- ***He's made this glorious place called the NJ just for us where He spared no expense, including His own blood and life.***
- He's dressed us in our wedding robes and is gently washing us as we speak.
- He will finish His work in us, presenting us to Himself on the wedding day as a resplendent bride.
- He's coming back to this earth to get us and live among us.