

Good morning Fellowship! If I haven't gotten the chance to meet you yet my name is Taylor Lowrey and I'm the High School Pastor here. Last week Kurt kicked off a new series talking about Heaven, and he did an incredible job reminding us about how to have a mindset that is focused on eternity. And I don't know about you, but when I'm focusing on Heaven it's not long before a lot of questions pop up in my mind about what Heaven will look like. Are the streets really made of gold? Are there really these big pearly gates up there that we walk through? Is there like a super long line to get in kinda like the DMV? I have no idea why but when I picture walking into the pearly gates there's always a line and it just feels like the DMV, and that feels more like Hell than Heaven to me.

Our brains can run wild when we think about Heaven. Guns and Roses described Heaven as Paradise City, where the grass is green and the girls are pretty. I think that's how all my high school boys hope Heaven looks. When I was growing up, I was really worried that Heaven was basically going to be one giant worship service forever. We're going to be facing God and singing songs to him forever, and it made me not excited about Heaven at all. I love worship as much as the next guy, and if Noah was leading the worship, I could maybe stick it out for another week or so, but an eternity of that... Yikes.

How every person thinks about Heaven looks different, but how does the Bible define it? Probably not a shock to any of you, but Heaven is the dwelling place of God. It's where God is. We know that once we pass on from this life into the next we will be with God forever. If you believe in Him, He promises that that's your future. So today we're talk about a few different ways this plays out, but the thing to remember is Heaven is where God dwells and where we as believers will dwell with Him.

If you've got a Bible go ahead and turn with me to Revelation 21, we're going to spend most of our time there this morning. The book of Revelation is a vision that God gave to the apostle John and it tells us how things are going to play out in the last days. Spoiler alert: Jesus wins, everything ends up great. And that's where we find ourselves in Revelation 21. This is right after the Great White Throne judgement that Kurt mentioned last week.

It says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

In this passage we see God's plan from the very beginning of time finally coming to fruition. He makes all things new. There is a New Heaven and a New Earth, but in order for those to be there, "the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." The first heaven is the one that we often talk about, the present Heaven. When we attend funerals and we say that whoever has passed away has gone to heaven, that's where we're talking about. When Jesus is hanging on the cross and he looks to the thief and says, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," Jesus is talking about this Heaven. That's where Jesus ascended and where he now sits next to the Father.

This is the Heaven that we sing songs about, it's where the angels are, this is the Heaven that we look forward to after death, but this Heaven is just the waiting room. It's the place where we'll be until Jesus returns to Earth. When that happens, everything changes. God's dwelling place will no longer be in the present Heaven. He will dwell with us. The New Heaven and New Earth is our true home. It's the home we were made for. It's the place where we're going to live with God and with each other forever.

This is the eternity that we need to cast our minds to, and that's the first thing that I want to draw your attention to in this passage, that the present Heaven is not our final home. Don't get me wrong, the present Heaven is awesome! It's the full presence of God right now and it is perfect and incredible. It's comforting that our family and friends that have passed away are present with God there right now, but God has so much more in store for us in the future.

My wife Jessie and I got married a few months ago, (It was short enough ago to where I feel like I can bring it up all the time and it's not annoying. We're getting close to that point, but we're not there yet.) and we were lucky enough to go on a honeymoon to Cancun. We got married in Florida where she's from and we flew down to Mexico from there, but we had a layover in Miami. We were there for maybe an hour, and then we got on another flight and went on our way. And Miami was fine, I had the worst burrito I've ever had in my entire life there, but that's besides the point. We went on to Cancun and spent our week there, and we had the best time. It was incredible to just hang there for a week and not have to worry about anything. But when we came back to Texas and everyone was asking how our honeymoon was, you know what I never mentioned? The Miami International Airport. I never talk about it, except for that garbage burrito. But I don't even think to mention Miami because it was just a stop along the way to our final destination.

In the same way, the Heaven we go to when we die, the present Heaven, is a temporary dwelling place, a stop along the way to our final destination: the New Earth. That is our true, perfect, eternal Heaven.

So how do we get there? Looking back at Revelation 21:1-2, it says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” In John’s vision we get to see a picture of the New Heaven and the New Earth. We see that the old heaven and earth pass away and then we get to live on the new one. Scholars differ about what this means, some people think that God completely destroys this Earth that we’re on and creates an entirely New Earth. But most scholars disagree with this. There are two Greek words for *new*. One is “neos” which means “totally new” and the other “kainos” which means renewed. Almost every time the Bible uses the word new for new birth, new self, new creation, new heavens and new earth, it’s “kainos” – renewed. God will not throw away the creation but renew it. This Heaven will be exactly how this world was always meant to be.

This is significant because the story of God is a story of redemption. God redeems what was broken. That’s what He does with us through Jesus. We were broken and our hearts were turned away from Him, and He redeemed us. He gave us a new heart, or maybe it’s better said, a renewed heart. He doesn’t throw the old stuff away and try again. No, He renews what is already here. He frees the creation from the bondage that sin currently has on it. He’s a God of redemption, that’s what He does, He redeems.

So since it’s renewed creation, there’s going to be some sense in which what we’re experiencing is familiar. One way the Bible describes Heaven is that it is our home. I want you to take a second and think back to your childhood home, the place where you grew up. Even if it’s been 50 years since you lived there, I’m sure you remember every detail. When you think about each room I’m sure there are memories that pop up. Memories of your parents, of your siblings, your pets. I grew up in Tennessee and when we go visit and drive back through our old neighborhood, I can’t help but get nostalgic and remember all those memories. Mom in the kitchen, jumping on that chair in the living room, running to my neighbors house to play computer)

So I know when we think about Heaven it can be hard to picture what it will be like, but because it’s renewed creation, it’s going to feel just like this world does. This new reality for us isn’t some ethereal, floaty existence. It’s going to feel as real as this does right now. You’ll be able to reach out and touch the people next to you, don’t do that now that’d be weird. But it’ll be that real. It’s tangible. We’ll eat and drink and walk and talk just like we do here, except we’ll be perfectly free from all the things that weigh us down on this earth. It’ll be physically familiar to us. Remember, God’s original creation was perfect until sin entered the world, and that creation is going to be renewed. So there’s going to be trees and rivers and mountains, everything that is good in nature. It will also feel emotionally familiar because we’re going to continue the relationships that we had with our brothers and sisters in Christ here – there. The moment we set foot on the New Earth, it’ll feel just like coming home.

Looking back at the text though we do have this interesting phrase, “And the sea will be no more.” (Pause) Where are my beach people in here? Well, sounds like you better enjoy it while it’s here! That stuck out to me because I absolutely love the ocean, and I hadn’t necessarily been looking forward to it on the New Earth, but the thought that it was just gonna

be gone caught me off guard a little bit. But the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, so it's possible that this doesn't mean exactly what it says here. In ancient times the sea was a symbol of death and destruction. Bandits and marauders would come in from the sea and attack port cities often, and the sea was also very unpredictable and powerful. Boats would regularly be sunk and people would lose their lives. When people thought of the sea back then they didn't think of the beach. They thought of destruction and fear. But if this verse says the sea is no more, then that lines up with exactly what God promises us in the future Heaven, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." So there will be beaches, I promise, but there won't be pain that the sea caused.

It's not a surprise to any of us that we are surrounded by the sea, and I don't mean geographically. Even before the pandemic year, we were constantly reminded that this world is not the way things are supposed to be. Thinking about where I grew up reminded me of a friend of mine named Justin, and we were best friends for a long time. Even after I moved to Texas we still kept in touch and maintained our friendship. I remember one day when I was a freshman in high school my mom randomly came to pick me up in the middle of the day, which was unexpected. When I came outside and saw her I could tell that something was up. She sat me down and she told me that Justin's dad had passed away. It was the first person outside of my family that I had known to pass away. After we talked for a little bit we decided to drive down through the night, just her and I, and attend the funeral back in Tennessee. Justin didn't know that we were coming and I remember showing up and seeing my friend for the first time in a few years, and he just looked different. He looked tired, and he looked really sad. I remember going to his house afterwards and talking and catching up. There was a lull in the conversation and I was trying to look for the right thing to say, carrying on any sort of normal conversation just felt disingenuous. I was trying to think of something, but before I could say anything I remember Justin just looking down and then looking at me and saying, "It's not supposed to be this way." And he was right.

Death, broken relationships, families being torn apart. That's not the way things are supposed to be. It's why we talk about Heaven at funerals. Because none of those things are a reality anymore. And on the New Earth, death won't even be an afterthought. God is in the business of redemption, and He promises to redeem all things and make everything perfect again. We'll be with those we love, and we'll be God forever.

So we know there's going to be New Heaven and New Earth, and that brings up the tension of like "But Pastor Taylor, didn't you say Heaven was the dwelling place of God? But now you're telling me that we're going to be on the New Earth, so is God still in New Heaven?" And that's fair. What we see in verse 2 about the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven is the New Heaven and the New Earth becoming one. Let's read it again. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with

them as their God.” Heaven is the dwelling place of God, and God comes down to Earth to dwell here with us. Right now, we think of Heaven as the realm of God and the angels and the Earth as where humans live, but once we get to this point in history, there will be no difference between Heaven and Earth. The phrase “Heaven on Earth” isn’t a euphemism anymore! Heaven and Earth will be one, and God will dwell with us.

That is the best thing about Heaven. If you missed last Sunday Kurt had a really powerful interview with one of our members, Richard, and that’s exactly what he shared. Heaven is about who we’re with. Heaven is the direct and complete presence of God. He will come out from the heavens and live among us. God’s glory will fill and permeate the entire new Heaven and new Earth. Wherever we go in Heaven, we will be in the immediate presence of the full glory of God. For the rest of eternity, we will never be separated from direct unhindered fellowship with God.

I don’t know how that sits with you. I think as humans we don’t really know what to do with that because it isn’t something that we can even begin to comprehend. I think most of us want to be excited about it, but it can be intimidating to us. I know I’ve felt that way. But listen to what Johnathan Edwards says about this. “God is the highest good of the reasonable creature (us), and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”

God is our highest good. In Heaven we will experience the fullest extent of God’s glory. Glory that isn’t masked by all the sin that weighs us down. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul says, “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.” Right now we only see bits and pieces of God’s goodness and glory. It isn’t because He hasn’t revealed Himself, it’s because sin is real, and it taints every part of us. But on the New Earth we’ll see the fullness of God, and we will love Him more than we will ever know. We will always want more of him, and because He is infinite, we will never grow tired. We will constantly be learning more about Him, constantly be experiencing more and more and more of His love and glory.

But on this side of eternity, we see through the glass dimly. Our future reality in Heaven is very real, but how does that change things for us today? Just a couple of thoughts as we close; first, if you have not made the decision to trust in Jesus, I pray that you would not leave here today without talking to someone about it. Heaven is not a fairy tale that we tell ourselves to make death easier. Heaven is a real place where the God of the universe dwells, and He wants you to know Him and be there with Him forever. He is a good God who loves you more than you could ever imagine, and Jesus gave his life for you so that you could know Him. If the

Holy Spirit is stirring you I pray that you won't ignore him, don't stuff that down. Trust that something real and genuine is happening in you and seek Jesus.

The other thing is that if you have trusted in Christ for your salvation, your intimate link with him in his redemptive work makes you inseparable from him, even on this side of eternity. As we walk with him and commune with him in this world, we experience a faint foretaste of Heaven's delights and wonders. On your worst day in this life, on the day that you are the most ashamed of, God looks at you and calls you a son or a daughter. There is room at the table next to Him because you are His adopted child. You are in His presence right now and He sees you as perfect.

Heaven is dwelling with God, and because of Jesus we can do that today. The Spirit of God is the gift of presence, and He is with you always. When you get in the car to leave here in a few minutes, you're in the presence of God. When you go take a nap this afternoon, you're in the presence of God, when you go do that thing that you enjoy and that brings you life, that's restful to you, He's there too. Worship Him in those things. Heaven's worship isn't one massive sing-along; it's worshipping God by giving Him His fullest glory and praise in everything we do. And we can do that today.

One of the ways that God has given us to worship Him is by partaking in the sacrament of communion together. We're going to take some time to remember Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. The band is going to come up and give us some time to reflect on Jesus, then I'll come back up and lead us.

(Leave)

Communion is a glimpse, a taste of what we will experience forever in Heaven. What we'll experience is unending grace and love from our Creator, and that's exactly how He sees you now. Communion is not a time to dwell on all the times that you have failed or to dredge all that up so that you can be acceptable before God right now. It is a celebration that Jesus has already done all the work for us. You are accepted. You are loved. It is finished.

"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Church, be encouraged today. As we look to eternity, let's celebrate the presence of God in our lives today too. I love y'all. Have a great week in the Lord.