

THE CITY WITH NO TEMPLE

Revelation 21:22-27 | June 8, 2025

In the TV comedy “The Good Place”, Eleanor Shellstrop wakes up in the after life and is told she is in “The Good Place” - a heaven reserved for the people who lived exceptionally moral and good lives. It’s this quaint, sunny, idyllic neighbourhood filled with endless frozen yogurt shops. There’s no swearing. The gardens and shrubs are all perfectly manicured. And all the dogs are friendly, because you’re a good person in the good place. And you can fly. On certain flying days with a proper permit.

The good place is a superficial paradise, where things seem nice, but are also kind of fake and shallow. The problem with the good place is the people: they’re the same people they were on earth, with all their quirks, character flaws, and selfishness. It doesn’t take long for it to be clear that the good place isn’t really that good.

When people who do not know God try to describe heaven it gets absurd and shallow pretty quick. A heaven without God quickly becomes a place where selfish individuals get whatever they selfish thing they want without consequences. When people who do not know God, try to describe paradise, it quickly sounds like a godless hedonistic place.

Marilyn Monroe said “if I’m going to heaven, I hope it has **champagne**.”

Nora Ephron said “In heaven, I’ll be cooking with **butter**.”

Kanye West said “Heaven is a studio. I want to make beats forever.”

Gary Player said “If there's a golf course in heaven, I hope it's like Augusta National.”

People imagine heaven as their favourite pleasures extended and multiplied forever. It’s champagne. Good food. Artistic expression. Golf.

The biblical picture of heaven is radically different. But its not less joyful, but far more joyful. Not less beautiful and satisfying and glorious, but more. The joy of heaven is infinitely greater than golf or champagne or butter, **because the joy of heaven is God himself**.

In Revelation 21:22-27 John continues to describe the eternal heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, heaven come down to earth as God makes all things new. In describing this heavenly city, he primarily describes it by what it is NOT. Sometimes the best way to describe the indescribable is by negation. By telling what is not there.

3 things that are not present in that heavenly city:

1. **There Will Be No Temple**

This is a big surprise. A city with no temple. In ancient times, this was unheard of. This is like a Canadian city with no Tim Horton’s. It’s unheard of.

A temple is the central and most significant part of an ancient city. If you visit any city that has real history, going back centuries and millennia. (Paris. Istanbul. Or Rome or Athens.) At the centre and heartbeat of that city is a temple or a mosque or a cathedral. A city with no temple is like a North American city with no stadium. A city with no professional stadium. But where does your team play?

Where are you concerts and events? Where is your civic pride? How can your city have glory and honour with no stadium?

The temple is the place where people worship and where they meet with God. In the OT and in other Jewish literature, they anticipated and expected a restored temple.

But when John sees the heavenly city, he sees no temple there. The reason? As we saw last week, there is no temple because the entire city is a temple. The entire city fills the world, and is the holy of holies. The entire city is the dwelling place of God's presence.

There is no temple, because God's people will dwell with the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb without restriction or boundary or ritual or sacrifice. The joy of heaven is God himself. What makes heaven so joyful, so beautiful, so good and glorious is to behold God himself. A heaven without God is not heaven. Is not beautiful and satisfying and good. We were made for a joy that can only be found in God's all-satisfying presence.

The reason that people think heaven will be like champagne or good food or music or golf is because as they experience those things it thrills their hearts and produces joy. Those things bring joy, and they want more of that joy. But what people often miss is that those joys are but echoes and shadows of the deepest, most satisfying, most heart-thrilling joy of all: the glorious presence of God. Champagne and butter and music and golf bring a kind of joy, because they were made by God as gifts for us to enjoy. But better than the joy of the gift is the eternal and greater joy of the GIVER Himself. People taste and see beauty and joy in this world and want more of it. But that joy is given to point us to the One who is the fountain of all joy: God himself.

The joy of heaven is God himself. But this isn't just a Revelation idea. This runs throughout the Bible.

Psalm 16:11 **"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."** There is full joy, true joy, eternal pleasure - where is it found - only in the presence of God. As we behold Him.

Psalm 27:4 **"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."** The great longing of the heart of the psalmist is to behold God, to see Him and be with Him. So we see, the great joy of Heaven is to behold God and be satisfied by Him.

Psalm 63:1-4 **"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."** Only God satisfies the longing of my soul. God's presence is like water in a desert place - it is the thing I thirst for and need. He satisfies me with His glory, with His presence. Beholding God is where all joy is found. Even Jesus speaks this way: Matthew 5:8 **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

Listen to the words of John Piper: **"Until the gospel events of Good Friday and Easter and gospel promises of justification and eternal life lead you to behold and embrace God himself as your highest joy, you have not embraced the gospel of God. You have embraced some of his gifts. You have rejoiced over some of his rewards. You have marvelled at some of his miracles. But you have not yet been awakened to why the gifts, the rewards, and the miracles have come."**

They have come for one great reason: that you might behold forever the glory of God in Christ, and by beholding become the kind of person who delights in God above all things, and by delighting display his supreme beauty and worth with ever-increasing brightness and bliss forever"¹

The joy of heaven is God himself. There will be no temple. The temple is the Lord himself and the Lamb. We will behold God and be satisfied in his presence with eternal joy beyond description.

3 things that are not present in that heavenly city:

1. There Will Be No Temple
- 2. There Will Be No Darkness**

The 2nd thing that John notices is NOT in that city: there is no need for sun or moon. There may be a sun and moon, just as the sun and moon are a good part of our creation that glorifies God, but there is no NEED for sun or moon. Because the glory of God gives the city all the light it needs.

Have you ever taken a flashlight outside on a clear sunny day? It adds no light, no difference. Its hard to tell if it is even on at all. That's the way that the glory of God and the lamp of the Lamb will outshine the sun and the moon. They're unnecessary, like shining a flashlight into the sun. And the centre and life-giving source of this city is the Glory of God. It's the glory of God that lights the city. It's the glory of God by which the nations walk. It's his glory that is the centre and life of the city.

The joy of heaven is God himself. It is his glory that gives light and life to everything. Heaven is heaven because God is there in all his glory. And his glory is what we are made for.

John is seeing here the fulfillment of the promises made in **Isaiah 60**. Isaiah 60 tells of a day when the glory of God will shine upon his people and his city. And the nations and kings of the earth will come and gather and bring their wealth and treasure to God in worship. The gates of the city will be continually open, and there is no sun or moon or darkness... because the LORD will be their everlasting light.

John sees all this will be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem, in that heavenly city. This is why, I think, he used the language of kings and nations. Connecting this passage back to Isaiah 60. Not because there will be nation-states and different countries and other monarchies. But because Isaiah 60 is being fulfilled. People from every tribe, tongue, language and nation are gathered in that heavenly city to worship God and are living in the light of his glory.

This is a final and full fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. That through Abraham the nations would experience the blessing of God. In the New Jerusalem, the nations are gathered in worship of God. That city is a multi-ethnic, diverse city. God has gathered a people from among every people, called to be his own people.

And the kings and nations live in **peace**. There is no rivalry or hostility. There is no war or conflict. No tariffs. No battles. No war-mongering. There is no "us and them", no racism, no apartheid, no caste system, no classes, no "haves and have nots". > there is only the one people of God, united together, living in light of God's glory.

¹ John Piper, *God Is the Gospel*, p.38

And (v.26) those nations will bring in “**the glory and the honour of the nations**” In Isaiah 60, the nations bring to God’s city their wealth. HERE, they bring the glory and honour of their nations to God in worship. Its not material wealth they are bringing, but themselves and their praise. The language of v.24— “They bring their glory into it”— suggests there is continuity between this world and that. Perhaps this means that people will bring their songs, their culture, their art, their music, their beauty to that city... all that is beautiful and true and good and glorifies God and his grace. All that glorifies God will be brought forth. All that honours God will stream into that city. That we will sing songs of praise in Ukrainian and Urdu and Hebrew and French and Arabic. People will bring art and music and beauty and lay it all down in praise to God.

Everything lovely and beautiful from the old creation will be brought into the new for God’s eternal glory. And the ultimate glory will be the people themselves: the greatest praise is the diverse people of God gathered before him. Justified, sanctified and glorified. They will eternally be a living, breathing praise of the glorious grace of God who saves sinners and welcomes them as sons and daughters.

Ephesians 1:5-6 “**He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**”

So this is a city of no darkness. No rivalry. No war. There will be no coveting in heaven: because you already have the greatest treasure imaginable in the presence of God himself. There’s no pride in heaven: for all self-glory dies in the glorious presence of God. There’s no greed in heaven: for all longings are satisfied in his presence, and there is nothing more you could want or desire.

A city of no darkness. A city where God’s people will walk in his glory. The glory of his name will be the light and life that energizes everyone and everything. There will be no darkness because God’s glory will light everything. The joy of heaven will be God himself.

3 things that are not present in that heavenly city:

1. There Will Be No Temple
2. There Will Be No Darkness
3. **There Will Be No Sin**

v.25 says **its gates will never be shut by day—and there is no night there**. There is no reason to shut the gates. There is no enemy to be kept out. No danger that could bring harm to the city. No threat to be feared. No enemy to be kept outside the border. Imagine a city where there are no security systems. No security cameras. No locks on the doors. No peepholes or ring cameras. In fact, the doors are open wide in welcome, and primarily serve for Beauty rather than security.

There is no night. Night is a time of danger and threat. Of wild animals and criminals, lurking in the darkness. Danger in the unseen. But this city has no night. Nowhere for harm to hide.

So there is no danger at all. Isaiah 11 envisions it as lions snuggling with lambs and children playing with poisonous snakes. There is no harm, no danger, and no risk. There are no evil people at all. Those who do what is **detestable and false** are not there. So there is no evil. No stealing. No crime. No immorality. No abuse. No hurt. No pain.

This means that evil people will be removed forever. But it also means that the evil in **my own heart** will be cured forever. “**Nothing unclean**” means that I won’t be able to sin. We sin because we do what our heart wants and what our heart wants is sin.

But in that city, having been fully sanctified, fully glorified, fully healed of my twisted longings and desires, I will be free from all sin. In that city I will only desire and long for that which is beautiful and true and good and glorious. I will long for the glory of God and be fully satisfied. No more will my heart chase after cheap substitutes. Fully healed and fully alive, I will find full joy in the presence of God forever.

God will protect his bride, his people, his holy city. Like in the garden of Eden, God will walk with his people. Unlike in the garden of Eden, we will not be able to ruin it. Sin will not be possible when all our hearts are repaired and remade. We will be free of sin forever. (Oh how I long for that!).

No sin will be in the city. Only those whose names are written in the **Lamb's book of life**. That is: all those whom God has chosen to save by the blood of his son. It is all those who belong to Jesus Christ.

We've seen this **book** several times already in Revelation. In Rev 3:5, Jesus told the faithful in Sardis **"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life."** In Rev 13, we were told that everyone on the earth worshipped the beast, that is **"everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain."**

This is mind-blowing! God has a book. The book has names written down in it. Names who receive life by the Lamb who was slain. When were those names written? Before the foundation of the world. And because their names are written, they will not worship the beast but will remain faithful to God. SO: before Creation, before Genesis 1:1, God knew that he would create a world in which he would save people, specific people, whom he knew and named, and he would save them by the death of his son. That before anything, God purposed to save a particular people by the blood of his Son. And now in Rev 21, we see that the very people whose name were written before the foundation of the world are those who will dwell in God's eternal city. So salvation is an amazing act of God's grace from beginning to end. If you are in Christ, if you have faith in Jesus it is because God set his love and grace on you before Genesis 1:1 and he will successfully bring you home to heaven in the end. From beginning to end your salvation is an amazing act of grace. And being an act of grace from beginning to end we will praise his name forever.

Heaven is a city without sin. It's hard for us to even imagine. No police. No security. No danger or harm. No hurt. No lies. No deceit. No betrayal. No immorality. No greed. No discontentment. No selfishness. No twisted or rotten desires. No unmet longings. No disappointment. No frustration or failure.

We've never lived a day without sin. We've never lived a day without being sinned against. We've never lived a day without worry, anxiety or fear because of sin in the world. We've never tasted what its like to live like this.

A city with no sin. Why? Because God is there and he will protect his bride perfectly and he will heal us completely. The joy of heaven will be God himself.

For those who know the grace of God and have saving faith in Jesus Christ.... John wants us to see that the joy of heaven is God himself. So set your heart, your joy, your delight, your passion on him now. Make him your supreme joy, your greatest treasure, your driving passion now. Live for his glory now.

A life lived enjoying God and living for his glory is an unwasted life. While others are pursuing fragile joys in futile places, let us live with joy and delight in God and his glory forever. As John Calvin said: "the very summit of happiness is to enjoy the presence of God." What makes heaven heaven is the joy of God himself.

But others here don't yet have faith in Jesus Christ. You might believe there is a God and a heaven. But you haven't come to the place of resting in the gospel, of trusting your life and future to Jesus Christ. You haven't confessed your sin and believed on Jesus.

This text is showing you that, if you continue in resisting Christ, you will be outside this city. Instead of the grace of God, you will face his justice.

Listen to Paul's words in I Corinthians 6:9-10 **"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."**

But then listen to v.11!!

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Such were some of you! You were lost. You were sinful. You deserved justice. You were outside God's people. Outside his grace. BUT! You were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus takes outsiders and welcomes them in. He takes sinners and forgives them and cleanses them. He pays their penalty, suffers their condemnation, and gives them his own righteousness.

Heaven is a glorious place. Heaven is a place of joy, of glory, of life, of wholeness. But it is only for those who confess and trust in Jesus Christ, who are saved by his death. Do not resist any longer, but place your trust in Jesus.