

Revelation 21:6-27 What's At Stake In Eternity?

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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On a day like today, when we stand at the edge of a new season of ministry for four pastors and elders, I considered the possibility of going to another section of Scripture and doing a topical message on ministry, or missions, or how to serve, or God's calling on our lives.

But as I thought about it I realized it was more fitting for us to continue on with our study of the book of Revelation – because now that we've reached the end, now that we're looking at what Heaven is like, I think it serves as a strong reminder of why these men are doing what they do, and why we hope to see more of you join them, and why we hope young Timothy grows up to be a great man of God as well.

It's because here in Revelation we see that heaven is real, but not everyone will go there. God is real, Heaven is real, there are really pearly gates, and streets of gold – but it's not for everyone. There will be people *in* heaven, and there will be people *outside* of heaven, forever. That's sobering, that's narrow-minded, that's discriminatory and it's not accepting, but it's true.

And that's why these men and their families are dedicating their lives to the service of God. They want to see people saved, they want to see lives changed, they want to see people in Heaven. They understand eternity is a very long time and it has either glorious or horrendous consequences depending on the choices you make on this earth.

So, would you turn in your Bibles with me to Revelation 21 and let's see what the Bible has to tell us about God, about Heaven, and about us.

Revelation 21:5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. **7** He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

So right off the bat we hear directly from God as He tells us who He is – He is kind, He is generous, He is creative, but He is also bold, strong, assertive – He is an authoritarian who uses all of His power for good. He "**makes all things new.**" That's good news - there's no exception clause in there, there's nothing you can mess up so bad that He can't redeem and renew it. You can try. Some of us were, or are, a piece of work before God got ahold of us, but we're not a challenge for God.

He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, from start to finish – there's no escaping and no end to His power.

And as our Creator He knows how fragile we are, so He offers Himself up as the water of life. (You know it's easier to drink water than to even eat food. All you have to do is open your mouth and then swallow. He's making it as easy possible for you to receive what He has for you.)

And if you receive, you are adopted as His son or daughter. Now think about that too – because who initiates adoption? It's not the child. It's the parent. If someone is going to be adopted who has to take action? The adult of course, the child can't adopt you. So if you want to change a child's life you have to take action, and if you're life is going to be changed, God has to take action, and He does.

He comes to us, shows us our sin, shows us our Savior and begins this relationship that we could never initiate on our own. This is God.

But did you notice it says something about us as well – it 7 [“He who overcomes shall inherit all things.”](#) What does that mean? Is this going to require a lot of hard work on your part? What about the days and seasons when you feel weak and defeated and vulnerable and unsure? What about the days you feel like you've been run over instead of being an overcomer?

Well, keep a finger in Revelation and turn over to the left a few pages with me and see what we discover in 1 John – written by the same John as the one writing Revelation.

[1 John 5:1](#) [Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?](#)

Look – God is not requiring an awful lot of you. He's asking you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Now, there's a lot wrapped up in that that you need to understand – you need to understand what it means to be the Christ – the Messiah, the one who was promised to come and save men from their sins. And, you have to know what sin is, and acknowledge the presence of sin in your life and therefore the fact that you need a Christ, a savior. And you need to believe that He is born of God and the Son of God – that He was fully God and fully man, and that that is actually what qualifies Him to be able to do all these things for us.

But you don't have to climb some mountain, or wear some clothes or some necklace or bracelet, or give so much money, or accomplish some project. You overcome not primarily by what you do, but by Who you believe in. Once again, you see, it's all about God and what He has done as the great initiator.

But in coming to Him, we must turn from our sins. You can come to God however you are, but He won't let you stay that way. And that's where we get into the whole narrow-minded thing of heaven not being for everyone. If you insist on staying in your sin, you insist on loving your choices more than you love God, there are consequences:

Revelation 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

My friends, this is absolutely critical for you to understand – and you 4th, 5th and 6th graders who are with us this morning – it is important for every one of us in this room to hear and know and clearly understand – everyone is not going to heaven. It is not automatic. It is not a right. It is not a guarantee received on the basis of where you were born, or who your parents are, or how good you think you've been or how bad other people are compared to you.

Friends, you don't even get to heaven by knowing that there was a person named Jesus who hung on a cross.

You get to heaven by being adopted by God and that happens when you hear AND RESPOND TO the gospel – the news that you are a sinner – that you do things that God says are wrong; you do it intentionally and unintentionally but the guilt is just the same. We sin too much and too often to say all of it was a mistake or an accident. So God comes to us and He shows us our sin – He points it out to us and then we have to respond and that's where the most critical thing in the universe occurs.

Will we agree with God that the things He calls sin are wrong, and will we repent – that word means to turn away from them, not just to say we're sorry but to actually want to stop doing them by God's grace and with His help; or, do we start making excuses for why it's OK for us to keep doing these things, at least occasionally.

Friends, if we try to justify ourselves we reject the justification that comes through Christ and we're left to stink in our own sin. God gives us this list, and it's only a partial list, of the kind of things that can keep us out of Heaven if they are not covered by the blood of Christ.

As we go through it, I want you to notice how varied the list is, I want you to notice how incredibly easy it is to be kept out of heaven.

The first sin on the list is cowardice. And yes, that means what you think it means – to be cowardly, there's no fancy explanation behind that in the original language, no subtle cultural nuance to take the edge off.

Did you know cowardice can keep a man or woman from God? Why? Well, it's not just timidity, not just hesitation in general, but what is in view here is an unwillingness to trust in God because it might result in your own physical or social harm.

Throughout history and around the world there have been times of persecution when identifying with Christ could cost you your life. We even see it today – isn't that why some of you have the Arabic 'N' on your social media accounts, or you have seen others who do – they're identifying themselves with Arab Christians who are being persecuted to death for simply believing in Christ and not identifying with Allah. And so they're being beheaded on beaches in Libya and suffering countless other tortures at the hands of demonic mad-men in the Middle East.

And in a much less brutal form you're seeing the constant attempts to silence and belittle and discredit Christians in the Western Culture and media. If you love Christ you must hate gays. You must hate women. You must be some ignorant buffoon from the backwoods who was raised on religious fairytales and Duck Dynasty re-runs.

It's much easier to become a Christian during a season of revival when the entire culture is trending toward religious interest. But there are times, and we are living in one right now, when you need courage to stand for Christ – the cowardly will not be saved because they are more afraid of what other people will say and think than they are of God. Jesus warned us of this:

Matt 10:32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

So what are we to do? Well, the Bible tells us over 100 times to “fear not.” And it's almost always because the presence of God or a promise from God was intended to give us courage and dispel fear

- **2 Timothy 1:17** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
- **1 John 4:18** There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.
- **Heb 13:6** (quoting Ps 118:6) *“The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*

Friends, God wants us to trust Him – to sincerely believe in our hearts and minds and therefore to take action with our lives as proof that we trust Him.

You see an example of that here in our midst this morning as we welcome Matt and Peg and their girls – they packed up their entire life into a few Rubbermaid bins and traveled half-way around the world to a city where they've never lived because they sincerely believe it was what God wanted them to do.

You see it as well in the lives of Bill and Marcella as they prepare to move to Haiti on Tuesday. Are there fears, are there doubts, are there questions? You better believe it. They don't have all the answers and neither do the Pottengers – they don't know how every detail is going to work out, but they know Who they trust. They know on Whom their feet are firmly planted, and so, instead of being cowardly, they are drawing courage from Christ and following Him wherever He may go.

Look at the rest of the list with me, this partial list of things that will keep us from Heaven if they aren't washed out of our lives by the blood of Christ:

- Unbelieving (faithless – ESV) – how can you be saved without belief? Sure we all have a few more questions we would like some answers to but at some point you must decide – how will you respond to the claims of Christ? Will you believe Him and His promises or not? The answer will determine your eternal address.
- Abominable (corrupt, vile, detestable) Wiersbe – “polluted” by sin
- Murderers – that sounds like a good criteria, right? We can agree on that one, but what about the next:
- Sexually Immoral - Do you know that God gets a say about your sex life – whether it's real or imagined. You can't just do what you want, whenever you want with whomever you want. We're not going to go into it right now, but I just want to make the point and make it clearly because misunderstanding it, and insisting on your view can keep you from God – God has determined what is right and wrong when it comes to sexual ethics.

The culture might not have many boundaries left, but according to God, not me, not this church, but according to Scripture, God says there are moral and immoral sexual activities and if you insist on clinging to those which He says are immoral, you do it at your own peril. Sexual immorality, if unforgiven, will keep you out of Heaven.

- So will sorcery, idolatry, and notice this last one – lying. Now, doesn't that seem kind of small, kind of petty in light of the other things we've just mentioned? But here's what I notice about that: even simple “little” sins will keep you from God. He doesn't grade on a curve. There's no margin. No wiggle-room.

Do you see how easy it is to be disqualified from Heaven? It is impossible for any man or any woman anywhere to meet these requirements on their own. None of us can earn a reservation for heaven.

So, how does anyone make it in? Simple: by being found in the Lamb's book of life.

Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, and are you, with His help, daily seeking to love God and keep His commandments – are you turning from sin and toward God? If so, though you may feel weak, though you may falter, though you may struggle – you are actually an

overcomer – not by your actions, but by your faith in the One who takes action for you. And here is what lays ahead for you:

Revelation 21:9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

Twelve thousand furlongs is about 1,500 miles – roughly the distance from Maine to Florida, so this city would have almost as much square footage as the Moon.

Assuming that in the history of humanity there were 100 billion people who have ever lived, and that 20% of them were saved, Henry Morris, calculated that this city would be large enough to give each person a "block" with about 75 acres on each face to "call their own."

17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according to* the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. 18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

Now, we've seen a lot of poetic language in Revelation, a lot of things are described as being "like" something else because we can't fully wrap our minds around what Heaven is exactly like – so is it really a cube? I don't know. But we can know this: God wants us to understand it's stunningly beautiful, and it's spacious – it's not a tiny little hotel with a no vacancy sign in the window. This is the city whose maker and builder is God (Heb 11:10) so we shouldn't be surprised that is beyond our comprehension.

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

We talked a lot about this last week, and if you weren't here I encourage you to go back and listen to it – we said that heaven is not about *what* you get – it's about *Who* is there. We tend to get hung up on the architecture, but the real benefit of heaven is that we are there with the architect – He is it's center of worship and the source of it's light.

24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

There are two encouraging and relevant things I see here and they relate directly to the people we'll be praying for in a little bit.

First, the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into heaven. This promise ought to be very near and dear to us as a church in the shadow of Washington DC – we have the chance to pray for and share with kings – top level leaders in the government of this and other lands. And one day, some of them will bring their glory and honor and drop it all at the feet of God. Some day some of you may become kings – He may lead you up incredible ladders to positions you never dreamed of, and if you are faithful, if you are molded by Him and not by the pressures of the people and politics around you, you will bring Him honor and glory.

Do you think about these things? Do you see that you have a chance to do more here than just survive the traffic and the expenses – you have a very, very, unique opportunity to affect souls for eternity! Souls of kings, and others, who could one day be in heaven because of the way God used you! Friends, be wise, be discerning, but be thankful that God has placed you where He has and instead of heaping up glory and honor to yourself and your accomplishments as if you did this all by yourself or for yourself, push it all right back to God.

The second thing I want to point out is that it's not just the kings that come before God, it's also the nations. Matt and Peg were calling the nations to Christ in Kenya, and now they're here in DC where they can call both nations and kings to Christ. Bill and Marcella are moving to Haiti, Doug and Rose are trying to get over to Italy – to call the nations to Christ and they will be successful. The nations will come. We see them here in Heaven.

But again, just like calling the kings – do you realize that you have the privilege of calling nations too? God wants to take some of you overseas to share the gospel and it's impact on lives. He's going to send some of you over as fully supported missionaries – your employer is going to take care of your paycheck and all kinds of benefits – but you're not going to be there just for the agency's sake – you're there as a dual-citizen – advancing the cause of your company or your government and the cause of the kingdom of Christ at the same time

– even it's only by intercessory prayer – God gives you an opportunity to take part in the advance of His kingdom.

And he's giving all of us the opportunity to do it here locally too. Twenty-eight percent of Fairfax County is foreign born. At Assist Crisis Pregnancy Center they saw women from 40 different nations last year. Friends, the nations are at our doorstep and we have the blessed opportunity to reach out to them in the name of Christ so that one day they can bring their glory and honor to Him.

But once again, it's not automatic, and it's not for everyone:

[Revelation 21: 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.](#)

The only way in is by having your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life as a testament to the fact that you have been cleansed and redeemed by His blood. You're not going to go tracking your muddy footprints of sin all over God's clean floor. You've got to let Him wash you first. Though your sins are like scarlet, He makes them as white as snow.

Have you experienced this kind of inside/outside washing, scrubbing, cleansing yet? Do you know it's a continual process – we need to keep coming back to remember what He has done for us and celebrating it until the day when all things are made completely new and sin is completely abolished and we finally become the men and women that the Spirit within us yearns for us to be.

And do you understand that those who have not experienced this cleansing, who have not found this water of life to quench their thirst, who have not experienced this adoption by God and do not walk in the light of His Son – they will be cast in the lake of fire?

Friends, this is what is on the line – Hell is real, and eternity is a long time. So Matt and Peg and Bill and Marcella, and Jesse and Auggie and many, many others are committed to answering God's call on their lives to reach out in Christ's name to seek and save those who are lost, to build up the church, and to strengthen the saints to do the works of ministry that God is calling them, calling you, to do.

May it never be said that God wanted to do a work in our child, or our spouse or our classmate or friend or roommate or co-worker, or boss, or salesman, or whatever's life and He couldn't find someone to pray for them or share with them – even just a simple invitation to church, or sharing a sermon or a book, or something.

People all around us are living lives that are sending them to hell. And that's not meant to be inflammatory or simplistic or fundamental, that's meant to be an honest reading of Scripture my friends. We're all headed for either a lake of fire or the city of God. I don't find any other options listed in the Bible.

So, what does God want to do about it in you, and what does He want to do through you? That's the question you need to wrestle through this morning as we remember what He has given us through communion and then we celebrate what God is doing through His servants, and then we fellowship with each other during lunch.

So, as the ushers come forward I want to ask you to consider – where do you stand with God? If your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, receive communion this morning – praise Him and thank Him for what He is saving you from and what He is saving you for.

But if you're not sure, if your life sounds more like the list we saw in verse 8, then me ask – what are you going to do about it? Will you try to handle it all by yourself, or will you surrender to the God who loves you and who is telling you the truth? Do you want to be forgiven and changed today?

If so, tell Him – pray a prayer like this right there where you are sitting and if you mean it, if it's real, He'll adopt you right here and now and then you can take communion with us.

God – I see that I am a sinner – I see and understand that I do things you say I shouldn't and I don't always do the things you say I should. I need your forgiveness. I need Jesus' death on the cross to be counted towards me. And I need your help – I want to change, I want to be more like Him, but I can't do it on my own – I'll give you my life if you'll give me Your Son and Your spirit.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Ps 119