

God Is Moving In!  
Revelation 21: 1-8

In his book entitled *Stories, Illustrations and Quotes* Robert Morgan tells a story of the death of a famous prince. He died unexpectedly, and the stunning news that the prince was dead quickly spread from the inner corridors of the palace to the outer courts of the city. His servants found him in his bed, where he apparently died in his sleep. "Where has he gone", asked one of them? "Why, to heaven" replied the others. No, said the one sadly. I knew this man for many years, and I traveled with him extensively. Every detail was always carefully planned out and anticipated. I never heard him say a word about going to heaven. It was a journey for which I saw no preparation. I don't know where he went, but I am quite sure he has not gone to heaven.

Many versions of that sad story have been told throughout the years, and much like the parables of Jesus it is a powerful way of revealing simple truths. One of those truths is that people are often afraid to talk or think about heaven, especially around people we don't know. A few weeks ago, I flew from Pittsburgh to Florida with a layover in Atlanta, and the airline attendant asked me if I wanted to check my bags to my final destination. When I told her no, I wouldn't be needing them in heaven she just gave me a strange look and said don't push me or I'll send you both there.

It seems like the only time we think about eternity is when we learn that someone we love, maybe even ourselves, is gravely ill or has died. Why is that we are more likely to think about going to heaven at a funeral instead of a baptism or a wedding? Even more troubling, why is it that some people appear to do everything in their power to either postpone the trip or cancel it altogether? I am not suggesting that we shouldn't look both ways before crossing the street, but that there will be times when we will have to choose which way to go. That is a topic for another Sunday. Today, we are celebrating All Saints Sunday, and we will focus more on the final destination of the saints rather than their journey.

One of the reasons we might avoid the topic of heaven and eternity is that we simply don't know enough about it. We tend to talk about things we are familiar with, like the restaurant we ate at last night or sports or politics. Heaven is a place that none of us have never been to, and it's not like we can find pictures of it on Facebook or Instagram. Even so, all we really need to know about heaven may be found right at our fingertips.

The problem is that we often choose to remain uninformed. That is true with many things in life, and with earthly things it might even be good at times. There are some things we really need not know too much about, like how hot dogs are made. But heaven is much different because it is eternal. In other words, we will be there for a very, very, long time, too long to count, and therefore it would be wise for us to know the truth about it. That is not always easy, for when or if we do allow our minds to begin thinking about what heaven will truly be like, we will have to do two challenging things. We will have to consider our own mortality, and then set aside what we already think we know about heaven. Those are both difficult to do, for a variety of reasons. Our earthly demise is not something most of us want to dwell upon. We also tend to seek affirmation of what we want to be true, rather than seek the truth. And if the topic of heaven does come up, more than likely a forsaken place that begins with the same letter will inevitably become part of the conversation and who wants to talk about that? Today, the two “H” words seem to be a bigger taboo than the “F” word was.

Consider this quote from an article written about 25 years ago in Time magazine. The piece was entitled “Does Heaven Exist?” The author said this- “in a curious way, heaven is AWOL. This is not to say that Americans think death ends everything or even that they doubt heaven’s existence. People still believe in it: it’s just that their concept of exactly what it is has grown foggier, and they hear about it much less frequently from their pastors”.

People on both sides of the pulpit can be afraid to talk about heaven. We are tainted by sin and affected by disappointment and heartache and as a result our human minds cannot fully comprehend what it will be like to be in a place where we will never ever experience death, sorrow, crying and pain again. The good news is that we can have hope and assurance that God has something better, not just better but perfect, planned for us than life on this earth. Whatever our fears might be, fear of the unknown need not be one of them. By His grace, God has a special way of making the invisible visible. Though mere words cannot adequately describe the glory and majesty of heaven, the living breathing inspired Word of God does. In many different places the Bible reveals a tiny yet sufficient glimpse of what awaits those who overcome. If all goes as planned, we will look at that topic in more detail in a sermon series I am planning for the new year. This morning we will look at the first 5 verses of the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. They reveal much about heaven and eternity.

The first thing we learn is that **heaven will be real**. It is a real place for real people. The apostle John caught a glimpse of it with his own eyes. He refers to it as the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God. It is a real place, just as real as the old Jerusalem is. It is a dwelling place for God, and a dwelling place for God's people. What exactly does that mean? The answer to that question and others like it are found by using Scripture to interpret Scripture. **Philippians 3:20-21** We may be citizens of the USA now, but the day will come when followers of Jesus will literally become citizens of heaven. Citizens are real people, not spirits.

The next thing we learn is that **heaven will be new**. A new heaven and for that matter a new earth is coming. That word new implies not just a replacement for the old, it also means it will be very different. **2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:10-13** This earth on which we live is a temporary dwelling place for the living, and the heaven we typically think of is a temporary dwelling place for the righteous, those who have died in Christ. The Scriptures reveal that at an appointed time, God will literally destroy both and replace them with new heavens and a new earth. It will be the same with our bodies. Jesus will transform our old earthly body into something new, a body truly fit for heaven. It will be the same, only new. It will be a real body, a resurrection body, a perfect body, a glorious body, much like the resurrected body of Jesus. **1 Corinthians 15:49** Then, in a royal wedding ceremony. God and His people will be permanently united, and nothing can separate us as we start a new life together on the new earth in the new heaven. Notice that the voice from heaven says God will come to dwell with His people, and not the other way around. It might sound strange, but heaven is simply God moving in with us!

Even more intriguing, there is a very distinct possibility that we will enter the pearly gates together and walk the streets of gold on a new earth. Of course, that makes perfect sense since we will also have a new body. We can be confident that these things are true. The one on the throne, the bridegroom, the one who created this world and everything in it, the one who created us, tells us so in verse 5. "these words are true and faithful". In our humanness, we will not understand all of what we read about heaven until we get there. But there is one thing we can know for certain. **Heaven will be holy**. It is God's holy place for God's holy people. How do we become holy? Five simple words. Place our faith in Jesus. Jesus is the only one who can make us holy. Let us believe on Him and worship none other. Amen.