

Destination Heaven

Revelation Series #12

Revelation 21-22; Colossians 3:1-4

Introduction: We call death things like "biting the dust", "buying the farm", "kicking the bucket", or "giving up the ghost." Yet, when we are faced with it there is the question that comes to mind that is as old as civilization itself. In fact, it is found in the oldest book of the bible - the book of Job.

"If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14, NASB)

The reason why it is such an important question is because there is something that every life has in common. Your life has an ending just as surely as it had a beginning. Your heart has only so many beats and then it will beat no more. Your lungs only have so many breaths and then they will breathe no more.

When you finally make that inevitable move that every person in history has made, or will make, from the cradle to the casket, the question is, **"Is there something more?"**

The Australian Aborigines, one of the most ancient peoples pictured heaven as a distant island far beyond the western horizon.

The Gilgamesh Epic, which is an ancient Babylonian tale, talks about a place of heroes and hints of a tree of life.

In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies were often accompanied by guides, by food, by maps that would take them into the afterlife.

The Romans believed that the righteous would play in the Elysian fields while their horses grazed nearby.

Illustration: Diane Komp, a pediatric oncologist from Yale University, describes being gradually converted from atheism to agnosticism to faith in Jesus Christ by witnessing the experiences of children near death. Kids who had no incentive to lie or to stretch the truth, who had no predisposed pictures of what the afterlife was like, who'd never seen the movies or read the books, told her the most amazing things. And in her book *A Window to Heaven*, Komp describes these encounters. She recalls sitting with a family in their final

moments with their 7-year-old daughter, a victim of leukemia. The little girl said, "The angels, the angels, they're so beautiful! Mommy, can you see them? Can you hear them singing? I've never heard such beautiful singing." Komp says, "The word that most closely describes what I've received from these children is the word "gift."

During their emergency room work, Dr. Maurice Rawlings cardiologist at the University of Tennessee, and his colleagues interviewed more than 300 people who claimed afterlife experiences. What made Rawlings's study distinct is that the interviews were not conducted months or years later but immediately after the experiences had allegedly occurred, while the patients were still too shaken up to make something up. Nearly 50 percent of them reported encountering images of fire, of tormented and tormenting creatures and other sites hailing from a place very different from heaven. They had caught a glimpse of something like what the Bible calls hell.

Dr. Rawlings concludes, **"I'm convinced there is a life after death, and if I don't know where I'm going, it is not safe to die."**

The reason Christians believe what they believe about life after death is two-fold: the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the testimony of the word of God.

Illustration: There was a man who died one time and his name was Solomon Peas. On his tombstone they wrote these words: "beneath these clouds and beneath these trees, lies the body of Solomon Peas, but this ain't Peas, it's just the pod, Peas shelled out and went to God."

This is exactly what happens. We shell out of our body, and we go to be with Christ.

Today we come to the last two chapters of Revelation, so obviously we're going to talk about heaven.

So, go with me to Revelation 21, starting in verse 1... ***"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the***

throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning, and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Now go to chapter 22, verses 1-5... *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."*

Go to verse 16... *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." 17The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." (NIV)*

Then verses 20-21... *"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." (NIV)*

Let's Pray

In Hebrews 11:10 we are told that Abraham was *"looking for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."*

Former baseball player and evangelist Billy Sunday once said, "if we could get a real appreciation of what heaven is, we would all be so homesick for heaven the devil wouldn't have a friend left on earth."

The bible teaches that there are three heavens. **First**, there is the atmospheric heaven, which is immediately above us, where the birds fly. **Second**, there are the planetary heavens, that is where the sun and the moon and the stars live day in and day out, but then there is what the bible calls "the third heaven."

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:2 ***"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows...4was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell."***

Heaven is such an awesome place. It's the place Jesus went to when he ascended from Earth after his resurrection. It's the final destination for the child of God. You know, sometimes you get on an airplane and if you're making connections they'll say, "What is your final destination?" Well, your final destination as a Christian is Heaven.

Every Christian ought to be **looking** for heaven. Every Christian ought to be **longing** for heaven. Every Christian ought to be **living** for heaven.

Someone has said that we see the first heaven by day; we see the second heaven by night: but for now, we see the third heaven by faith.

We are given in this wonderful passage of scripture a snapshot of this third heaven. Though it is a **correct** description, it is not a **complete** description because the bible says ***"eye has not seen, and ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love him."***

Now when it comes to Heaven there are lots of people who are very confused about Heaven. Some of the biggest questions people have are: What is Heaven like? What do you do in Heaven? Who gets to go to Heaven?

STORY: I ran across a story preparing for this message. A redhead, a brunette and a blonde all died. And they went up to meet the Lord. And the Lord said to them, "Listen, you must now climb the stairway to Heaven." There are a thousand steps on the stairway to Heaven and God said, "Now here is the deal.

I'm going to tell a joke and if you laugh before we get all the way up, you don't get to come." Seems kind of strange, but they said, "Okay, you're God."

So, they start up and God starts telling jokes and God can tell some good jokes. After step forty-two, the redhead just bursts out laughing. She's disqualified. They walk a little more, and get on step five-hundred, seventy-seven, and the brunette just starts cracking up. She's disqualified.

They get to step nine hundred and ninety-nine and the blonde just starts cracking up. And God says to her, "I haven't even told the last joke yet." And she said, "I know, but I just got the first one."

Obviously, that is not how you get to Heaven. God is not going to tell you jokes and you don't have to climb a stairway. But still, there is a lot of confusion.

And maybe you're here today and you say, "Pastor, you're going to talk about Heaven and I'm here with major problems in life right now. My marriage is falling apart. My business is in shambles. I'm not going to be able to afford much of a Christmas for my family. It's not going to help me if you talk about the sweet by and by. Why don't we just talk about the here and now.

I get that but let me say that a study on Heaven will make a difference in your life today.

Colossians chapter three, verse one, in the New American Standard Bible says, *"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on Earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."*

Notice with me this morning three questions regarding Heaven.

Question number one: What does God say about heaven?

1. Heaven is a Real Place.

John emphasizes in the first two verses that this new heaven, this new earth, this new Jerusalem are real places that he actually saw. This city is not a spiritual figment of someone's sanctified imagination. It is a literal place. In verses 15 we are given the measurements of this city, in verses 18 we are given the materials of this city. Both signify that this a real place.

Jesus said in John 14, "For I go to prepare a place for you." The word place in John 14 is the Greek word **topos**. It is where we get our English word topography. The definition of topography, is the technique of graphically representing the physical features of a region on a map.

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place." A real place. Now sometimes we get the idea because we see it in television and on movies that Heaven is a gaseous, spooky kind of realm of disembodied spirits. That is not what Heaven is. Heaven is a real place.

Jesus had a real physical body. He ate with his disciples after His resurrection, and He ascended in His resurrected body to a place called Heaven.

Heaven is a place you can see. It's a place you can touch. It's a place you can feel. It's even a place you can measure and describe its material beauty.

2. Heaven is a Prepared Place

Back again to John 14; Jesus was talking to His disciples, just before the cross, the night of the Lord's Supper. Jesus is preparing them for the time when He will not be with them any longer, and just so you know, Judas has already left.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4You know the way to the place where I am going."

5Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

3. Heaven is a Beautiful Place.

Now, I have been to some beautiful places in my life, and so have you. Some of you have been to Niagara Falls. Some of you have been to the Grand Canyon, or Hawaii. Some like go to Outer Banks or the mountains or other countries.

We have seen beautiful places on Earth and this earth is fallen. This Earth was cursed. The Bible says in Romans chapter eight that the world, the ageless longing of creation of the world waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. It waits for God to remove the curse. So, if a curse fallen earth can be so beautiful, how much more beautiful will Heaven be? (Keith Green quote)

The Bible tells us in Revelation 21 & 22, ***"and I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."***

Just like a bride adorned for her husband." We all know when a bride gets ready for her wedding, she goes all out. You can't just go to Belk's and pick something off the sales rack. You head to a bridal shop and get the most expensive dress you can afford. And they buy the shoes, and when the day comes you've got to get your hair all fixed up.

For most of us guys, not a big deal. But they get their hair done. They do their makeup. They get their nails and toenails done. Some of them spend several months in a tanning bed beforehand to get the perfect look. They pull out all the stops. And God says the Holy City is like a bride adorned for her husband. God says it is a beautiful place.

The New Jerusalem is described as Majestic.

"And the construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. And 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, 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. And 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." (vv. 18-21.) There

It is also Massive.

“15The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

Now 12,000 stadia equals 1,500 miles. Just picture a city that could begin at the top of Maine and go all the way down to the tip of Florida. 1,500 miles long; 1,500 miles wide; and 1,500 miles high.

I believe this is God's way of telling us that there is room for everybody who wants to go to heaven. This world had no room for God's son when he came to this earth. But God has enough room for all that wants to come to him.

4. Heaven is an Exciting Place.

It's real, it's prepared, it's beautiful and it's exciting. You know what is an amazing fact? So many people, even Christians, get the idea that Heaven is a boring place.

The average Christian sees heaven as some sort of "eternal retirement home where they are going to sit on a puffy, fluffy white cloud, pluck a harp, eat grapes while being fanned by the angels. That picture is not only unbiblical, in a sense it is ungodly.

Where do we get the idea that Heaven is a boring place? Mark Twain said, "**I'll take Heaven for climate, but I'll take Hell for company.**" Where does that come into play? It comes from the devil.

The Bible says in Revelation 13:16, "***he opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander His name and His dwelling place and those who live in Heaven.***"

He slanders His name, he slanders His dwelling place, he slanders God's house, and he slanders Heaven. Why would he do that? Because Satan used to live there and he got booted out because of his sin, because of his pride and he is bitter and he knows how awesome Heaven is and so he, who is a thief, who's a liar and the father of lies, wants to lie to you and me, he wants to steal away the joy of the thoughts of Heaven, he wants to get us to believe a lie that Heaven is a boring place.

If you believe all you are going to be doing is sitting on a cloud plucking a harp, who wants to do that for all eternity? Nobody!

Michael Shermer, a famous atheist, wrote, “If there is no disease, sickness, aging, or death in heaven, if there are no obstacles to overcome and nothing to work for, what is there to do? Forever is a long time to be blissfully bored.”

Isaac Asimov, the science fiction writer, said it more bluntly, “Whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”

Will we be bored out of our minds? And the answer is “No.”

So even though the Bible doesn’t get into details, you can be certain you’ll have a job to do, and it’s going to be the best job you’ve ever had. You aren't going to experience one boring nano second in Heaven.

Heaven is...A real, physical place where we’ll do real, meaningful work in the actual presence of God. This is the biggest reason heaven could never be boring: God is there! Revelation 21:3 says it clearly: God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

5. Heaven is a Safe Place

He goes on to tell us in verse 8 that ***“the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”***

Heaven will be a safe place. In heaven you won't need an alarm system on your mansion, you won't need policemen on the street, because heaven is going to be a place where we dwell in perfect safety.

No funerals...no tumors...no car accidents...no overdoses...no more teenage kids committing suicide...no more need for Saint Jude Children’s hospital, because there won’t be any more kids getting cancer. Can you even imagine that world? Whatever it is that causes you mourning or crying or pain-whether it’s broken relationships or depression or disappointment or loneliness or being hurt by other people, those things will be removed.

There are no graves and no cemeteries in heaven. There are no obituary columns in the newspaper, there are no funeral processions over those golden streets, death is swallowed up in victory.

Just think of it. There will be no more broken homes, no more broken hearts, no more broken hopes, no more broken health, no pain, no pangs, no moaning, no groaning, no sighing, no dying, no crying, no more sickness, no more suffering, no more sorrow. It will be wonderful to be there in a land with no hospitals, no medicine, no doctors.

5. Heaven is Jesus' Place.

Someone somewhere once said, "the light of heaven is the face of Jesus. The joy of heaven is the presence of Jesus, the melody of heaven is the name of Jesus, the harmony of heaven is the praise of Jesus. The theme of heaven is the work of Jesus. The employment of heaven is the service of Jesus. The duration of heaven is the eternity of Jesus, and the fullness of heaven is Jesus himself."

Remember the New Jerusalem, that came down out of heaven? In 21:15, it says this angel that was showing John around took a measuring rod, and he measured the city. And it was laid out in a perfect square. That's strange because the actual Jerusalem isn't laid out in a square. But you know what was, The Holy of Holies; that spot in the very center of the temple where God's presence would show up.

And once a year, on the Day of Atonement-the High Priest alone would get to experience the actual presence of God. So, here's what this is saying: in eternity, everywhere you go, you will be walking on holy ground in the presence of Jesus.

Like it says in Psalm 16, ***in God's presence is fullness of joy and in His right hand, there are pleasures forevermore.***

None of us has ever experienced "fullness of joy." We've had glimpses of joy. But in heaven our joy will overflow in ways we've never even dared to dream. Heaven is a real, physical place, where we'll do real, meaningful things, in the actual presence of God.?

Question number two: Why are we commanded to think about Heaven?

Maybe you don't think about Heaven very much. And the Bible says think about it. Now, why should we think about it?

A. Because it helps us in our trials on earth.

And you're here today and you say, "Man, I know about trials. I like to hear sermons about trials and difficulties and problems because I have them in abundance. But how does thinking about Heaven help me in my problems?" You say, "people don't have problems like I have problems.

You look healthy. You look happy. You look like everything is going your way." I mean you look like your marriage is going well. You look like things are going good in your family, but my family is failing; and I just got back from the doctor, and he says that I'm very sick and I may die and so I have it worse."

Paul had it worse than you, didn't he? He was beaten, stoned, put in prison. You know who had it worse than Paul? Jesus!

Jesus, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus who had to go to the cross and before He went to the cross was whipped almost to death, was beaten, they plucked out His beard. You couldn't even recognize Him. That is how badly He was beaten. And they spit upon Him and then they nailed Him to a tree and raised Him up and He was on that cross for six hours dying a terrible, horrible, painful, excruciating death. How did He do that?

Hebrews 12:2 says, "***who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***" He put the joy before Him.

That is what Moses did. The Bible says that Moses, in Hebrews 11, "***He chose to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.***"

How did Paul get through everything that he got through? ***"For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us."***

His mind was on Heaven. That is why he told the Philippians Christians, ***"I have the desire to depart and be with Christ for that is very much better."***

So many people, all they see and all they think are problems. They think earth and they don't think Heaven. Get your eyes off your difficulties and start seeing the joy that is set before you.

We've all sang that song - when we all get to Heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. You need to fill your mind with Heaven because one day the Lord is coming to take us as His children to Heaven.

STORY: In 1952, Florence Chadwick, she was a swimmer. And she tried to swim from the Pacific Ocean, Catalina Island to the California Mainland. She swam the English Channel, she was quite a swimmer. And it was a chilly, foggy day when she got into the water and she swam for fifteen hours and she could barely see through the fog. She could barely even see the boats that were right by her. And she said, "I can't go another inch." And her mother was in one of the boats and said, "Honey, keep going, you're not far away." And she said, "I can't." And she stopped and they had to pick her up out of the water.

She found out after they picked her out of the water, she was one half mile from the California Mainland. And she said, **"all I could see was the fog. I think if I could've seen the shore, I would have made it."**

You and I need to see the shore. We need to see what's on the other side of this LIFE and keep that in our minds and in our hearts. Because God has something wonderful prepared for those who love Him.

So, the thought of Heaven helps us with our trials on earth.

B. It helps us in our work on earth.

You said, "My work on earth? Why I'm a coach? I'm an accountant. I'm a home-schooling stay-at-home mom." I'm not talking about that work. I'm talking about your job assignment from God to be his witness. That's your real

job. And if you think on Heaven, you will witness a whole lot more, because every person you meet you start thinking, is that person going to Heaven?

You don't want for one second, the people you know to miss out on that. **It helps you to be the witness that God wants you to be.**

C. It helps keep our priorities on earth.

Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven," 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***"

If you and I are heavenly minded, seeking the things above, that is where we want to invest. Because this world is not our home we're just passing through.

Jesus said in Matthew 6, "***For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.***" Where your treasure is, your heart will follow and where your heart is, your treasure will follow.

God doesn't talk about the greatest commandment is to give Him your money. The greatest commandment is to love Him with all our heart and if God has all your heart, He has everything.

Last Question: Are you sure you are going to Heaven?

I ran across an interesting statistic. It said, for every one American who believes he is going to hell when he dies there are one hundred and twenty who believe they are going to Heaven. We just think the default setting of life after death is Heaven. But the Bible doesn't say that. Jesus didn't say that.

Jesus didn't say it's just a few that go to hell and the majority go to Heaven. He said the opposite. He said, "***Broad is the road to destruction and many are those who travel that road. Narrow is the road to life and few there be that finding it.***"

People think, I thought I was going to Heaven because I'm in church today, I was in church last week, and I'll be here next week. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to McDonalds makes you a Big Mac.

Can you imagine you got your name on the church roll but you never got your name in the Lamb's book of life; and when you reach the end of your life you hear the Lord say, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

That would be horrible. So, how can I know for sure?

Two questions. First question, have you died? Col. 3:3 says, "**For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**" You've died. Not physically, but to the old self and have received new life in Christ. That's what salvation is.

Water Baptism pictures that. You go under the water to picture the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. You come back up to picture the brand-new life you have in Christ.

Second question is Christ your life? Verse 4 says, "**When Christ, who is our life, is revealed then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**"

Is Christ your life? Warren Wiersbe says, "Life is what you are alive to." I talk to people sometimes and they're not very interested and they're not very engaged then all the sudden you bring up a subject that they're alive. You bring up a subject like computers, sports, TV, whatever.

What are you alive to? Is Jesus your life? Is there a passion for the Lord, for His people, for His work, for His will?

Saint Augustine, the great theologian, was once looking at the sun setting over the Mediterranean Sea, and he said, "**If these are the beauties afforded to sinful men, what does God have in store for those who love him?**"

I'll close with this story. Albert Einstein, the brilliant scientist, was also the absent-minded professor. He was on a train traveling from Princeton and the conductor came to check tickets and he got to Albert Einstein and he said, "Tickets please." And Albert Einstein looked in his pockets here - no ticket, looked in his side pockets, his pant pockets - no ticket.

Looked through his briefcase - couldn't find his ticket. The conductor said, "That's okay Doctor Einstein. We know who you are. We know you bought a ticket. It's okay." And then the conductor went on and Einstein got down on his hands and knees and began to look under the seat for his ticket. And the

conductor saw him and he said, "Dr. Einstein, we know who you are. You don't have to do that. You don't have to worry about that. We know who you are." And he stood up and he said, "Young man, I know who I am too. What I don't know is where I'm going!"

Do you know where you're going? Do you know your destination is heaven?

When the roll is called up yonder will your name be called? Or will your number be up? I urge you with all the urgency of my soul, don't miss heaven.