Lesson 13  May 28, 2017

THE NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH

I.  THE FUTURE ACCORDING TO PETER  Charting pgs 40-42

Peter sees three “worlds” separated by two great catastrophic events.

1. The pre-flood world - “The world that then was” 2 Peter 3:6
   
   Catastrophe of the Flood that destroyed the planet’s surface

2. The present world - “The world that now is” 2 Peter 3:10-12
   Christ’s Second Coming
   Millennial Kingdom
   
   Catastrophe of Fire that burns the planet to its atomic structure
   (“heaven and earth fled away” Rev 20:11)


Four practical applications of prophetic truth: 2 Peter 3
1. Fervent Evangelism 9-10, 15
2. Holy conduct and godliness 11
3. Hopeful anticipation 12-13
4. Diligence in developing godly character 14

II.  THE GLORY AND DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

In many Christian’s minds, heaven brings to mind a bodiless existence of playing a harp or floating on clouds. Some think of it as an eternal church service, others as an eternal rest. But what do we know about heaven and the eternal state? What does the Bible promise us? First of all, theologians err in calling it “the eternal state.” The Bible never refers to Heaven that way. The word “state” implies no change, no time, no movement as if it were just a static condition. What is missing in heaven is decay and death. The 2nd law of thermodynamics seems to either be suspended or there is provision for constant renewal. Time does not cease in heaven. Heaven is a place we can get very excited about. It is not static, but dynamic. It is not merely a state of mind or a spiritual reality, but an actual physical place. The influence of Greek philosophy influences us against linking spiritual with physicality. But everything in Scripture including the incarnation argues for this link.
A. HEAVEN IS A REAL, PHYSICAL PLACE PREPARED BY GOD

The New Jerusalem is a real place whose builder and maker is God. Jesus promised, in John 14: “I go to prepare a place for you.” Hebrews says that Abraham looked for a city that “has foundations” whose builder and maker is God.” In Rev 21, John sees the heavenly city coming down out of heaven from God, but he never actually says that it rests upon earth—instead it may orbit the planet earth.

This heavenly city (or country) is the eternal home of all the redeemed. It is either a perfect cube- a giant “holy of holies” in which God dwells with His people, or a pyramid or a sphere, because its length, breadth and height are all equal.

Some writers cannot conceive of anything other than “spiritual” (read non-real) realities. Leon Morris, (an otherwise excellent, conservative expositor) writes in his commentary on Revelation,

“There is a good deal of vivid description, sometimes of a very material kind. But when John speaks of streets paved with gold, of a city whose gates are made of single pearls, and the like, we must not understand him to mean that the heavenly city will be as material as present earthly cities. It is his way of bringing out the important point that the ultimate state of affairs will be very precious. He is concerned with spiritual states, not with physical realities ¹ (italics mine).

B. THE SIZE OR MEASUREMENT OF THE CELESTIAL CITY

Why is there such an emphasis on the measurement of the city in Rev 21-22, if God does not expect that we grasp its size. God wants us to realize that He has made a place for us to dwell. This puts substance into our view of eternity.

This is the largest space station ever constructed! It is a virtual, hollow planet larger than Pluto and 25% smaller than our present moon. In the weightlessness of space a wall of only 72 yards thick will serve quite well over a 1500 mile expanse. (72 yards thickness of the walls over 1500 miles distance)

What Revelation describes is a “hollow moon,” an “artificial planet” in which the inhabitants live in the very presence of God Himself.

The immense size of this structure needs to be considered. It stretches from St Louis to Los Angeles and from Brownsville, Texas to the North Dakota Canadian border! Its square-mile surface alone is some 2,250,000 square miles. Its area at its base is equal to that from the Mississippi to the West Coast of the USA! Then, it is that tall! It is 1500 miles in each direction.

What size is a cube of 1500 miles? The Planet Pluto is about 2284 km (1420 mi) in diameter. The diameter of the moon is about 3480 km (about 2160 mi), or about one-fourth that of earth, and the moon’s volume is about one-fiftieth that of the earth. The space-object described here is ¾ the size of our present moon. And it orbits earth at a distance of 238,857 miles. Of course the volume of the celestial city is much less than our planet earth, but we only dwell on the planet surface. In this God-made orbiting space station the people dwell within it.

No doubt this is what Jesus referred to as “My Father’s house” in John 14:1-6 which he went to prepare. In it are many dwelling places, or apartments much like there were apartments in the holy Temple. This is one reason why it is called a “city.” It is full of dwelling places for the people of God to inhabit for all eternity.

The New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21-22 would appear from the planet surface to be the same size as the moon if it orbited at a closer distance. This celestial satellite (indeed moon) may very well orbit the earth much the way that the moon does.

The brilliance of this celestial city was like a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 21:11 When viewed from the planet surface with thinnest atmosphere (on a great and high mountain) the best spot for viewing a heavenly satellite.

C. THE MATERIALS OF THE CITY

The materials described as present in the New Jerusalem are all translucent. The unique aspect about each material described in the account is that light passes through it. Note the emphasis on clarity. It

1. The material of the 1500 mile high wall is crystal-clear jasper. It has see-through walls.

2"Pluto (planet)," Microsoft® Encarta® 96 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1995 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. © Funk & Wagnalls Corporation. All rights reserved.

3"Moon," Microsoft® Encarta® 96 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1995 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. © Funk & Wagnalls Corporation. All rights reserved.

4"Moon," Microsoft® Encarta® 96 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1995 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. © Funk & Wagnalls Corporation. All rights reserved.
2. Although the city was pure gold, yet it was like clear like glass. This is obviously a kind of transparent gold that both reflects and allows some light to shine through.

3. The 12 massive foundation stones of the city are jewels and also would reflect brilliant color as light passed through them. Each of them were adorned with other beautiful stones as well adding to the beauty being described.

4. Even the street of the city is a transparent gold color!

The reason why the materials in this city are translucent is because light is intended to shine out from it and through it. This “moon” (orbiting satellite) is not a light reflector as is our present moon, but an original light source. like our Sun.

It has no temple because it is designed as the awesome “holy of holies” itself. It has no need of sun or moon to light it because God in all his glory shines out from it. The glory of God illumines it day and night. For that reason there is no night there. Note that the Scripture does not say that no sun or moon exists anymore, only that the city itself has no need of them.

On earth however, it sheds light that the nations may walk by it. Like the moon lights the night sky, so this orbiting “moon” will light the earth. The gates are described as pearls. 12 giant spheres on the four sides of the cube are its gates.

The glory of the nations must refer to tribute and honor and worship of the peoples who inhabit the new, renovated earth. While the redeemed inhabit this celestial city and reign with Christ forever (22:5), who are those upon earth?

No less than three times in 21-22 the nations are mentioned outside of the celestial city yet apparently living upon the earth.

D. THE INHABITANTS OF THE CELESTIAL CITY

Hebrews 12: 22-24 lists the inhabitants of the Heavenly City:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (NASB)

In order of importance I would organize them this way.

You have come to:

1. God the judge of all. (The most important Inhabitant)
2. Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant
3. Myriads of angels in festive assembly
4. The church of the firstborn ones (plural) The Church
5. Spirits of just (righteous) men made perfect OT saints
Observe the structure of Hebrews 12:21-24 in the Greek. There are 8 different entities. The word “and” (kai) separates each item in the list from the others. This means that the term translated “general assembly” is probably not one of the eight. It should be translated “to a myriad of angels in festive assembly.”

Translating the Greek into English

“But you (plural) have come [at a point in the past and now remain]—
- To mount Zion (Sion)
- And to (the) city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem
- And to myriads (10,000’s of) angels in festive assembly
- And to the church of the firstborn ones, those who have been enrolled [at a point in the past and now stand so enrolled in heaven]
- And to God, the judge of all
- And to the spirits (pl) of righteous men made perfect (or complete)
  d. of the perfection of just men who have gone on before, pass.⁵

Heb. 11:40 to be made perfect implies resurrection and reward bring to an end, bring to its goal or to accomplishment in the sense of the overcoming or supplanting of an imperfect state of things by one that is free from objection. ⁶
- And to Jesus, (the) mediator of a new covenant
- And to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than the (blood of) Abel.

We don’t register ourselves, but God records our name in his book of Life!
Songs and gospel choruses reflect the wonder of this marvelous truth.
“When the roll is called up yonder,” or
“Oh my name’s written there on the page white and fair,
In the book of God’s kingdom, my name’s written there!”

The Consummation of the Ages: 1 Cor. 15:24-28

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.⁷


Perhaps due to the influence of movies, books and television shows, there are a lot of myths and misunderstandings about heaven. People have a lot of questions that need to be answered. What is heaven like? Last week we talked about that. Let me summarize for those who were away. Although people have the idea that heaven is a bodiless existence seated on the clouds with harps, that’s far from what the Bible says. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 comprise one segment of Scripture that tells us more about heaven and eternity than any other.

Last week we looked at the description of heaven; its measurements, its characteristics and its inhabitants. If you take the Bible literally it teaches that heaven is a real place. We saw that it measures 1500 miles to a side. It is a golden, translucent cube big enough to hold all the redeemed of all the ages. There is no reason to take this text any other way than quite literally. If we take it literally everything in the text actually makes sense. The Bible seems to describe the holy city, (really a country) coming down out of heaven from God but never landing on the planet surface. Instead, the New Jerusalem orbits the planet earth, but we do not know at what distance. Some writers envision the New Jerusalem in stationary orbit over the earthly city of Jerusalem. If it is further away it would appear smaller in the sky. However distant it may be in orbit, this heavenly city, created by God, is the place to which Jesus said he was going, and the eternal home of the redeemed.

The materials of the city are translucent. Light passes through the walls of the city so that the light of the glory of God shines out from it like the sun. While the city has no need of the sun or moon because the Lamb himself is the light, that does not mean that the sun and moon do not exist! It is possible that this home of the redeemed will be present in orbit above earth during the millennial kingdom, and it will be the home of believers for all eternity. It is remarkable that the Scripture says, in Revelation 21:24-26 that there are nations (peoples) upon the earth who walk by its light and there are kings of the earth who bring their glory into it. While there’s no night within that orbiting satellite, that doesn’t mean there won’t be day and night on earth. The kings of earth will bring the glory and the honor (tribute) of the nations into that holy city, yet nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it.

Just as God created the first heavens and earth, so he will renovate the earth and make it new. I do not see it as an entirely new creation of a different kind because the Greek word for “new” implies quality. The first heaven and earth will be destroyed by fire and will pass away, and in its place the new heavens and the earth will be formed. The apostle Peter, in 2 Peter chapter 3:10 to 13 says this;

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burnt up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking
for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to his promise we look for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

As the book of Revelation describes it, heaven will be beautiful beyond description. But the beauty of the place will pale into nothing compared to the beauty of the Person of God himself.

We know that when believers die they go to heaven. What’s the difference between the believer’s experience immediately after death in heaven and his experience of the new heavens and new earth throughout eternity? The Bible tells us clearly in 2 Corinthians 5, at the moment that we die as believers, we go into the presence of the Lord. “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Jesus said to the thief who was dying on the cross beside him, “today you will be with me in paradise.” Because he trusted in Christ as his Savior, even as he died, his soul was taken to be with the Lord after his death. That is the believer’s experience today. Believers who have died are taken into the presence of the Lord to await the day of their resurrection at Jesus Christ’s coming for his own at the Rapture of the church. After death, while we are with the Lord, I do not believe that we experience all that we will experience after we are resurrected and inhabit the Celestial City above the new earth. That raises the question --

**What will we experience in Heaven? What are the Joys of Heaven?**

**THE SEVEN JOYS OF or BENEFITS OF HEAVEN**

1. **Dwelling in The Immediate Presence of God**

Revelation 21:3 says, and I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying “Behold, the tabernacle (dwelling) of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. And they shall be his people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” (Rev 21:3)

All that the Old and New Testament anticipated finally becomes reality for the people of God. The longing of the saints of all the ages is finally satisfied.

With David in Psalm 23, we can say, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The longing of God is finally satisfied in that all of His redeemed have come to dwell with him. God is calling out a people for his own name’s sake from every tongue, tribe and people of the world that he may dwell with them and they may be his people and he may be their God. It is an infinite privilege to be counted among the people of God. It is the highest of all honors to be associated with the one, eternal, Creator God. There is no greater privilege than to be accepted in the presence of a holy God. So the first Joy of heaven is to finally dwell in the awesome, wonderful presence of God!
The second joy of heaven is—that we will have the inestimable privilege of beholding the full and unveiled face of God in all his glory.

2. Beholding the Unveiled Face and Full Glory of God

Revelation 22:4 says it simply, “And they shall see his face” (Rev 22:4). Paul, the apostle, spoke of this in 1 Cor. 13:12, “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.”

David, the prophet and King, wrote in Psalm 17 of what would satisfy him. “As for me,” I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with beholding Thy likeness when I awake [in resurrection] (Ps 17:15).

The emphasis in heaven is on the Person of the Lord not just the place. Do you remember the request of Moses when he was with the Lord? Let me see your glory, he asked of God. And God said “No! Because no man can see my glory and live!” What Moses requested to see and God denied him in this life, we who believe, will finally enjoy!

In heaven, Jesus’ High Priestly prayer in John 17:24, will finally be answered. “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, in order that they may behold my glory.”

The hymn writer put it this way;
Oh that will be glory, Glory for me!
When by his grace I shall look on his face,
That will be glory; be glory for me!

But there is more. Not only will we…

- Dwell in The Immediate Presence of God and
- Behold the Unveiled Glory of God, we will

3. Share His likeness and Glory

More than merely seeing the glory of God, the Bible tells us that we will share it! The apostle, Paul, wrote, “When Christ who is our life appears, we “will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4)

On the basis of our future destiny Paul exhorts us in Colossians 3:5 to “therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greet which amounts to idolatry.”

None of these things should have anything to do with our lives because we are headed for glory. If we really believed that, it would dynamically change our lives! Our destiny is
to be like Christ! Not only to share his glory, but to share his moral likeness; and to share his holiness.

The apostle, John, says, “We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He [Christ] is pure.” (1 John 3:2). Do you have this hope? Is it evident by the purity of your life?

The Joys of Heaven include:
- Dwell in The Immediate Presence of God and
- Behold the Unveiled Glory of God, we will
- Share His likeness and Glory
- Only in heaven will we fully realize all of eternal life

4. **Realize the fullness of Eternal Life**

Right now, if you believe in Christ, you have eternal life. In John 5:24 Jesus said, “truly truly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” Eternal life is not something we get in the future it starts now! Jesus did not say you will get eternal life, he says you have it right now. Many Scriptures support this important point. But all the benefits of eternal life do not fully arrive until heaven.

Revelation Chapter 22:1 reads, “and he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,…”


*Jesus said I give unto them abundant life and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand (John 10:10).*

Revelation 22:2 goes on to say, “in the middle of its street and on the either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing [or sustenance] of the nations.

The tree of life from which man was barred in Eden is now restored to all of the redeemed. Jesus says, “I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life, without cost.” Rev 21:6 The spiritual thirst of mankind is forever satisfied in God and the Lamb.

The Joys of Heaven include:
- Dwelling in The Immediate Presence of God and
- Beholding the Unveiled Glory of God, we will
- Sharing His likeness and Glory
• Fully realizing all that was promised in eternal life

5. **Freedom Sin and all its consequences  Rev 22:3**

“And there shall no longer be any curse.” Nothing accursed – No more “accursed thing” There will be no possibility of perishing (Rev 22:3). The curse on fallen creation which was pronounced as a result of sin, is finally and fully lifted. Heaven will bring freedom from all suffering, “no more death, mourning, crying or pain” (Rev 21:4).

What is true of Christ will be true of all who have been redeemed by Him, “In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

Rev 21:4  *And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.*
No more separations among the people of God. No more funerals to attend. No more visits to the ER. No more growing older, no more sickness, no more crying, no more pain, no more death. Heaven will be wonderful because of the suffering that will be absent.

The Joys of Heaven include:
- Dwelling in The Immediate Presence of God and
- Beholding the Unveiled Glory of God, we will
- Sharing His likeness and Glory
- Fully realizing all that was promised in eternal life
- Freedom Sin and all its consequences

6. **Perfect Communion with God and All Believers**

In Heaven, believing loved ones will be reunited. This is the greatest family reunion of all time! Part of the joy of heaven will be the reunion of the saints. With that reunion will be fullness of Knowledge of one another. “I shall know as I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

But, someone may ask, “How can we really be happy knowing that our lost loved ones are not there? Won’t we grieve for them and won’t heaven be ruined because we miss them? It is a good question. The Bible does not answer it directly, so far as I can find, but God does not say there will be no tears, only that He will wipe them all away. There may be tears of regret, and loss, but I have to believe that God in his mercy will enable us to have perspective and to understand so our joy is not diminished and his glorious name is magnified.

The Joys of Heaven include:
- Dwelling in The Immediate Presence of God and
- Beholding the Unveiled Glory of God, we will
- Sharing His likeness and Glory
- Fully realizing all that was promised in eternal life
- Freedom Sin and all its consequences
• Perfect Communion with God and All Believers

7. A Perfect and Holy Environment  Rev 21:27

Heaven is characterized by Holiness: “nothing unclean will enter there.” In heaven, you will never hear God’s name taken in vain. You will never hear another lie. There will never be anything immoral, unclean, or evil. Locksmiths will be out of business. Security firms would have no customers. Pornography won’t exist. Darkness of every kind will be gone forever. All the wickedness that vexes the soul of a saint on earth will be absent in heaven. Part of the joy of heaven is that there are no sinners there. Outside are those whose lives were characterized by sin.

“And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the lambs book of life. But the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, they are part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”