

Before I go on a trip, any trip around town, or out of town, I plan for three things: I plan the destination, I plan the length of time that I will be gone, and I plan who I will see when I'm there or on the way. Destination, timing and length of stay, and people to see. The "what", the "when", and the "who" of the trip.

If I don't know the roads, I MapQuest it ahead of time, if there is time to play, I look through the features of the place in my AAA book, I plan dates of arrival and departure, and plan who I will visit while there.

Well, friends, we are on headed in these last two chapters of Revelation into unknown territory. The last two chapters of Revelation tell us most of what the Bible reveals about the ultimate journey with a destination that is truly out of this world. This trip will last an eternity, and who will we see? We'll see for the first time, the Lord God Almighty face to face. Tonight, I want to help you look at your trip-tik so that you know some of what to expect.

Last weekend, Gene reminded us that the myth of 'happily ever after' does not exist in marriage or anywhere else on earth. But the anticipation of heaven is the great hope of the faith that we have as believers. And so for us, we have the assurance that not only does 'happily ever after' truly exist, but that it will be even better than 'happily ever after', and far beyond any of our expectations.

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For as Paul reminded his readers in 1 Corinthians 2:9: No eye had seen, no ear had heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Finally, as we come to the conclusion of our year-long study of Prophecy and Revelation, we have reached the climax. It doesn't get any better than this: God's final word to us, as to what heaven will be like is here in full color:

**Slide 11** a place far more glorious than we can imagine, time with no beginning and no end, and a relationship with our God that will be so satisfying that no one who is there will ever thirst for anything better.

The only way we can begin to relate to heaven as a perfect place, eternity as a reality and the ultimate intimate relationship with God is by comparing it to experiences that are already familiar to us. So let's look first at the place where we will be going. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1) And after six days, He saw everything that He created and said, 'it was very good.' Before the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there was no death, disease, famine, war, natural catastrophe, cancer, weeds, rust, pollution, hatred, murder, rape, lying, corruption, wife-beating, child-molesting, greed, and a thousand other ills that have plagued man for thousands of years.

But soon Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and with that disobedience, a curse was placed on man and the domain of heaven, earth, and sea over which he was given stewardship. The heaven and earth which were created "very good," now became very bad. Every broken body, every disturbed mind, every hurting heart – the collective tears of the human race – can trace their origin back to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

As we learned last week, some of the original righteousness will be restored during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. But the sin nature of man will still exist, and it will give rise to a final rebellion still in the future. Satan will have a brief parole during which time all his followers both living dead, will face their time of judgment and seal their doom in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The earth, now free of the curse of evil for the first time since the sin of Adam and Eve, will be finally and completely redeemed, and then look what will happen according to 2 Peter 3:10: **slide 12**

The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Now that's pretty dramatic and final...., but John doesn't see it as final with his perspective in our opening verse in this week's lesson: the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..... and there was no more sea. (Rev. 21:1)

Greek verb translated "pass away" means "to come, pass over, rather than complete annihilation. When Jesus said, "heaven and earth will pass away" in Matt. 24:35, He was speaking of a "passing" from a corrupted and polluted heaven and earth to a renovated, perfect heaven and earth. Let's look more closely at the three elements that will pass away: [slide 13](#)

1. The first heaven: the Bible refers to heaven as three different realms.

The first is most frequently referred to in the Old Testament as the "sky" or the "firmament," which appears as an arch that is spread over our earth. This is the heaven that contains clouds, the area that birds fly through. As a consequence of sin, man has managed to pollute the sky and in addition to that the first heaven was defiled when the angel poured out the seventh bowl into the air (Rev. 16:17) causing a huge plague of hailstones.

The second heaven is the interstellar space, between planets and universes; it's where our NASA probes the far reaches of the outer space and sends back via satellite amazing pictures when you can see on-line when you log to their websites. The second heaven will not be destroyed at the end of the world.

The third heaven is the home of God. It is the place Paul spoke of in 2 Cor. 12: 2 when he was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things of which he was not permitted to tell. The third heaven will not be destroyed, but will apparently move to earth to encompass the throne room of God.

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We learn that the first heaven will pass away, and then the first earth will cease to exist. As a consequence of sin, man has polluted the earth in his effort to control its resources. In the future, the angel's first bowl will be poured out on the land

to bring forth sores and boils and destroy many people. The defiled land must also be must be restored to make way for a new earth.

Thirdly, there will be no sea: so we can assume that the sea will pass away. To the ancient mind, the sea was not a tranquil place of soothing waves that lulled one to sleep and was a desirable location on which to live. Rather it was a place of separation, storms, and destruction. The bowl judgment turned the sea into blood and later gave rise to the beast and the dead. Most the world's pollutants end up in the ocean and so it too will require a complete redemption and cleansing from its defilement. But that does not mean that there will be no water; heaven will have streams and rivers of living waters for our enjoyment. The sea in its present form will not exist in heaven. But don't feel bad about it, because as Isaiah wrote: [slide 15](#)

Isaiah 65:17

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

The new earth will completely overshadow anything we experienced here in the old earth. The new earth that John saw was a totally cleansed, completely regenerated, and absolutely perfect paradise in all of its pristine beauty before the advent of sin and consequent curse upon all of creation. This new earth is our heaven, our future home that Jesus has been preparing for us for two thousand years. The concept that heaven is in the clouds where we will be floating around and playing harps has no biblical reference. Instead, the new earth, our heaven, is a physical place, a perfect planet where we will dwell with glorified bodies, free from sin, evil, sickness, suffering, and death. There will be new skies, a new outer space, giving the entire universe a "fresh start" whether physical or spiritual. And there will be the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). [Slide 16](#)

The old Jerusalem, of course, is the city of David from the Old Testament. It was named the city of Salem when Abraham encountered its ruler, Melchizedek, a priest of the most high God. Later, Abraham came there to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. King David defeated the Jebusites who later lived there, renamed it Jerusalem and made it his capital. King Solomon built a temple in Jerusalem to be a habitation for God on earth. It was at Jerusalem where the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world. It is to Jerusalem that Jesus will return for coronation as the Lion of the tribe of Judah to become King of kings and Lord of lords.

JERUSALEM is the center, hub, and *capital of human history*. However it will be defiled in the future during the time where it persecutes the saints, as we read in Revelation chapter 11, and like heaven and earth will require a new identity.

Jesus made a wonderful promise to all of those who believe in Him when He said in John 14:2-3, "In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again so that where I am there you may be also." Now, John is looking at that very place Jesus had promised him many years ago. It is the NEW JERUSALEM that will descend out of heaven and rest upon the earth. It will be a place where people will interact in perfect community; a sinless, pure, community of righteousness. Such a city can never be the achievement of man, but only a gift from God. And as such, it will be prepared as a bride adorned for her husband: John uses a most striking, beautiful image of bride coming down the aisle, ready to meet her husband; a perfect gift in a beautiful package.

It is a flawless gem, like a diamond with light coming from the inside and refracting its rainbow colors all over the new heavens and the new earth. It is flashing the reflection of God's glory in infinite light--the ultimate light show.

**Slide 17** Its dimensions are said to be 12,000 stadia – a cube of approximately

1,380 sq miles (1,380 miles in width, height, and depth). It appears as a chandeliered city over Jerusalem.

To put this size in a perspective, consider the distance of Maine to southern Florida, or from the Atlantic Ocean to Colorado. If you allocated 1 mile of height per floor level, then there would be 1,380 floors, with each containing 1,904,400 square miles. Therefore the total surface area of the New Jerusalem would be 2,628,072,000 square miles.

The total surface area of the Earth is only 510,100,000 square miles. The surface area of the New Jerusalem is more than 5 times the surface area of the Earth. It consists of high walls, 12 gates, each made with a single pearl, with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, laid out north, south, east, and west in four groups of three just like the tribes camped around the tabernacle when they were in the wilderness after they left Egypt.

The city is constructed of the most precious of materials; twelve precious stones, eight of which were found in the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament. In heaven, gems will be so common that they are used for construction! Last Sunday, Gene used the visual image of cement, water, and stones upon which to build a strong foundation for building, elements which are pretty common and are in abundant supply on earth. But in heaven, we will be walking on precious metal and stones that today are only used for expensive jewelry.

The twelve expensive stones for the foundation of the city have written on them the names of the twelve Apostles. Paul told us in Ephesians 2:20 that the apostles are the foundation of the church, and here they are: the foundation of the New Jerusalem. And on Main Street, asphalt and concrete are things of the past; Main Street in heaven is paved with gold. The value system of heaven is the opposite of earth; see the former things will not even be remembered. John witnessed that the sun and moon are no longer needed. The New Jerusalem will possess the

Shekinah glory or the presence of God; heaven has no night for the Lord is the light. And without the moon, there will not be the gravitational pull that keeps us grounded. Our heavenly bodies will be able to transcend space and move around on the multi-layered streets in the cubic space of the New Jerusalem.

Well, now we have an idea of what heaven may look like, so let's look at the second part of happily ever after: the aspect of time. Our life in heaven is eternal. There is a longing in the heart of man for eternal life. Whether one pursues eternal life through an elaborate process of mummification, as the Ancient Egyptians did, or with a belief in reincarnation, or pursuit of the fountain of youth, or through cosmetic surgery and organ transplants, most people have a desire to live forever....somehow! Everything we ultimately fear is rooted in the fear of death. But, fear is negative and heaven is a place of no negatives. There will be no more tears, no more pain, and no more sorrow. There will be nothing disappointing. There will be nothing unfulfilling. There will be nothing lacking. There will be nothing wrong. There will be nothing limiting. There will be nothing to cry about. There won't be anything to get depressed about. There won't be anything to get distressed about. Nobody ever dies; death is eliminated. Without fear of death, eternity becomes a way of life unknown since the Garden of Eden, for all who have trusted in Jesus Christ.

Now for sure, heaven will bring many joys: a beautiful place, life everlasting, but the best part of 'happily ever after' will be the presence of God Himself. That will indeed be your dream come true. John writes of it in verse 3 with these words: *"Behold, the tabernacle 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)*

*The Message* paraphrase says it this way: Look , Look, God has moved into the neighborhood and is making His home with men and women! They are His people and He is their God.

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle of Moses, and later, the temple of Solomon represented the place where God dwelt on earth. But now, John sees God moving His headquarters from the third heavens to the New Jerusalem, to the newly restored, sinless earth to dwell among His creation for one reason only: intimate communion with us where we get to see Him face to face. In the Old Testament, God's people knew that no man can see the Lord and live, (Exodus 33: 20), but Jesus promised us in the New Testament that those who were pure in heart would see God. The day will come when we will be made completely pure and we will be able to look at God's face and not be ashamed.

In verse 6, we read: *"He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."*

'It is done': the redemptive plan of God is completed in all aspects on earth as it is in heaven. When Jesus said 'it is finished' on the cross, He had completed the work for the salvation of sinners in heaven, and that act entered the church into the era in which we live today where creation still groans in anticipation of the coming Kingdom. When the One seated on the throne says, "It is done" all creation will have been redeemed and restored to their rightful place, all causes of evil will have been removed, and righteousness will reign. Just as he completed his work of creation on the seventh day in Genesis, at that time God will have completed His work of restoration.

He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, He was from all eternity - and His Kingdom will have no end. God's existence, and indeed our own, will never again be limited with time constraints. I never seem to have enough time to get all the things done that I think I need to, so that idea of no deadlines or time constraints in heaven is one that I am looking forward to.

Who has the great hope of reaching this wonderful destination? You'd think everyone who hears about this trip would get the map and get prepared, wouldn't you? Although everyone is invited on this trip, not everyone will go.

Heaven belongs to people who have a deep sense of spiritual thirst. They must first recognize the depth of their depravity and their great need for a Savior. To him who is thirsty, God will satisfy that thirst from the spring of water of life. While Jesus was on earth he promised living water to those who were thirsty, and taught that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, will one day be filled. Do you struggle today with that hunger and thirst for what is right? I know many of you do, even though I have so much for which to be thankful, I'm never satisfied; I want to get it right, I want to teach the perfect lesson, be a Godly role model, pray prayers that touch the heart of the Father, I want to worship with a sincere heart, to have a peaceful home, have the confidence that my service to others is God-honoring, and to know that my life is devoted to living out the will of God, but the truth is, the tension between what I desire and the reality of living in this fallen world will not cease on this earth. How do we balance the thirst for righteousness with trust that God is working out all things according to His perfect plan when we go through what you've all gone through this week?

Only by looking ahead to this time, when all things are reconciled in the new heaven and the new earth. We thirst with the great hope that one day that thirst will be satisfied at the spring of the water of life.

But getting to the place where that thirst is quenched will take a commitment to overcome the world and all of its enticing wickedness and still remain true to Christ. There are two groups of people who are going to be in heaven: those who are thirsty and those who are over comers. Heaven is not a universal reality for most; only a minority of people truly hunger and thirst for righteousness and find that thirst quenched at the spring of life.

There is a serious and solemn warning to those with the serious character flaws listed in verse 21:8, the cowardly who are afraid to take a stand for Jesus because they can't stand up to the reproach of men. The vile murderers, sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, idolaters and liars, those sinners have served themselves in their wickedness by loving the world more than the King of Kings. The New Jerusalem is a city where nothing that defiles can enter, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. For those, heaven is our reality, and our eternal destiny.

The great hope of heaven will indeed be a time of 'happily ever after'. There, we'll reach a place which has been specifically prepared for us by Christ, where we will know at once that we are home; secondly, we will have an eternity to enjoy it; and most importantly, we'll enjoy a perfect relationship with our Lord, which we have always desired.

At one point, in this chapter, John must have been in a daze, awestruck and unable to take in all that he was seeing; that may have been the scene here, because the one seated on the throne had to remind him in verse 5: Write this down, for the words are trustworthy and true. I'm sure that sent John scrambling to capture all that he was seeing before him.

Thankfully, John did write it down and God arranged for its preservation so that we have it almost 2000 years later to give us hope and assurance that commitment to Christ will result in great reward. The words are trustworthy and true.

Is happily ever after a fairy tale? It may appear to those outside that it is. But to us, the roadmap is clear; the destination, perfect in every way and prospect of a completely fulfilling relationship with the Lord give us great confidence that when we all get to heaven, we will sing and shout the victory.