

What Heaven Will be Like

Revelation 22:1-5

I would like you to imagine that you are a young man betrothed to your beloved. You have left her to go prepare a place for her. You've been gone for some time already, but you are eager to encourage her. And so you write her a letter. What would you want to say to her in that letter? I think you would want to communicate several things:

1. You would remind her that you love her and that you will be coming back for her very soon. (22:7 – “Behold, I am coming soon.”)
2. You would encourage her to be faithful to you while you were apart. (“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”)
3. You would want to tell her about the place you were preparing. You would maybe describe the village, and the property where you were preparing your future home – overlooking a little stream with a place for a garden. You would maybe tell her about the house you were building and give her a vision for what it will be like to live there together for the rest of your life.

That's what Jesus is doing here in in chapter 22. He is our betrothed, and he has written a letter for us. As the letter comes to a close, he is telling us about the property, the home he is building for us, the place where we will join him and live with him forever.

This vision is meant to thrill us, and to profoundly motivate us to remain faithful to our Lord and eagerly await his appearing.

The experience of biblical Christianity is saturated with the anticipation of the life that is yet to come. It is a Christianity firmly grounded in and engaged with this world – but all the while with our hearts and hopes set on the world to come.

Paul

Phil. 3:13 *One thing I do, forgetting what is behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Col. 3:1–4 *Since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Peter

1 Peter 1:13 *Therefore...set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus wants his beloved bride to live with confident, eager anticipation for the home he is preparing for us. To that end, Jesus gives us, in glorious colors, a view of that life and the world to come.

I. What Will We Have in the New Earth?

22:1-2 *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city;*

It's fascinating to me how Jesus is able to describe our future home with him in symbolic language that doesn't tell us much about the actual "look" of heaven, yet the imagery touches our heart and gives a true sense of it nonetheless.

What you should see and sense in this river is the glory and wonder of LIFE. This river is the river of the water of life. If you lived in an arid, dry part of the world where it seldom rained, nothing would communicate life to you like the image of a river. The river is what would make life possible – it was how you watered your crops and provided drink for your livestock. Life was simply not possible without it. But if you had a home on the river, you were tapped into life itself.

This river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and carries to the city, to the bride, all the love and grace and goodness and kindness and glory of God himself. This is God himself sharing his presence, life, and light with the inhabitants of the city.

The clearest OT background for this image is found in Ezekiel 47. The prophet Ezekiel has a vision where he sees a stream flow from the temple, the place where God dwelt. And that stream grew in power and volume as it flowed until it reached the Dead Sea.

I've never been to the Dead Sea, but it is called "Dead" for a very good reason. Nothing lives there. Not a single fish, no crabs, no mussels, no phytoplankton. Nothing except a miniscule number of bacteria. It is the marine version of the valley of dry bones. Dead to the nth degree. But listen to what Ezekiel is shown in his vision.

Ezekiel 47:6-8 *And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern*

region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. ⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish."

When the river of the water of life hits the thoroughly Dead Sea, it will transform it into a living sea, swarming with abundant life!

This is a picture of what happens when God pours out his love and grace and truth into the life of a dead world and a spiritually dead sinner.

John 4:14 – Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 7:37–39

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' " ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive...

The river is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. The **Spirit** of God communicating to the **people** of God all the **glory** of God purchased by and mediated through the **Son** of God! That's heaven! That's our future home!

One of the things we noted last week was that there was no death in heaven. Nothing associated with the curse – no more crying, no more pain.

Rev. 22:3 *No longer will there be anything accursed.*

Here we are shown what **IS** in heaven – LIFE!

One of the things that I love about Michigan is that, in the proper season, it is exploding with life. Picture the scene of a little valley, the hills carpeted with green grass and maybe some wildflowers. A small stream bubbling along with crystal clear, ice-cold water. A strand of trees along the edge, maybe apple trees, loaded with ripening apples. And some cows and sheep in the pasture, fat and contented. And the scent of the air. The sheer, overwhelming fruitfulness, goodness, and life of the scene makes your heart hurt. That's a little glimpse of our future home. All the life you see there is from God. And all the life we will know in the new heaven and earth will flow from his very presence. Everything about our new home will be saturated with his overflowing love and life. The evidence is seen in the tree of life.

Rev. 22:2 ...also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

This is not a single tree, but a forest, lining the river of the water of life – and sharing that life.

Trees have the amazing ability to take light and water and transform them into magnificent, succulent, soul-satisfying fruit: apples, peaches, cherries, plums, bananas, figs, avocados – the list goes on and on. In the new earth, the tree of life drinks from the river of the water of life, basks in the light of God's love, and produces fruit in great variety and every month. The goodness and love and glory of God will saturate all that is so that you may feed on it, tasting it in all its flavors, riches, and life-giving joy and satisfaction. We will drink from the river of God's delights and eat at his banquet table of love from the richest of fair – forever.

Jesus wants us to see what he is preparing for us. This truth has transforming power.

Thomas Chalmers wrote a sermon titled *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* – the point being that only when our hearts are captured by a greater affection will they be able to let go of the old addiction. This vision of our eternal home with our Lord is meant to function with a compelling, cleansing, purifying power.

1 John 3:3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself...

This vision of what is yet to come has the power to set us free from our love of sin, our addiction to self, and all the idols that plague us. When you determine to live more and more for this, to set your hopes fully on what is to come, you will see that nothing in this world is worth comparing to the glories that God has prepared for those who love him.

II. What Will We Do in the New Earth?

There are three things to note from verses 3-5.

A. We Will Worship (v. 3)

Rev. 22:3 ...his servants will worship him.

Phil Newton points out that the term “worship” here is the term used for the servants who worked in the tabernacle and temple. They would not be responsible for offering up the sacrifices, but they would tend the fires, clean out the ashes from the altar, fill the oil in the lamps, etc. They worshiped God in the mundane, ordinary upkeep and maintenance of the temple.

But the fact that this service was in the temple and for the worship of God transformed the mundane into the magnificent. They were not just cleaning an altar or filling a lamp with oil – they were performing holy acts, holy service, with reverence and joy in the presence of a holy God. It was a high and holy calling to serve in the house of the Lord, reserved only for those specially called and trained to do it.

***Psalm 84:10** I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*

What this means is that in the new earth nothing is mundane. Every work, every act, everything that could be conceivably considered mundane or lacking significance in this world, will be heavy with glory and saturated with significance in the world to come. Every work and act will be a holy service of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving in the presence of God.

Imagine being a taxi driver. Not a lot of glamour to that. But what if you were asked to be the personal chauffeur of Dick DeVos, LeBron James, the President, or the Queen of England? It's the same task but radically transformed in its significance, joy, and glory!

Everything we do in the new earth will be radically transformed in its significance, joy, and glory. Everything will be done in the presence of God, in the joy of our wedded relationship with Christ Jesus, and in the full power of the Holy Spirit.

B. We Will See God

***Rev. 22:4** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

This might not seem like a true action verb, but it is. It's the most significant, incredible action verb of all. We will see his face. Again, God the Father doesn't have a "face" – he is Spirit. But to "see his face" is to be able to view his glory and stand in the presence of his infinite majesty without spot, without fear, and with great joy. It means that there will no longer be any moral stain in our being. Divine holiness will pose no threat. The perfection of the Almighty God will only be a joy.

Jesus **does** have a face. And we will see it. We will be face to face with Jesus Christ, in all his beauty and glory. We will see the face of the One who knew us before the foundation of the world and claimed us to be his very own. The One who patiently bore with us all through our life, who held us fast and never let us go. The One who sustained and guarded and guided us all through this veil of tears. The One who loved us and gave his life for us. We will see his face.

C. We Will Reign with Him Forever

I don't know the exact nature of this reign. The Scriptures seem to say that there will be different responsibilities given to different saints. But the point here is that every child of God will participate in the glorious, eternal reign of Christ. The new earth will not simply be the experience of Jesus reigning, but our participation in the glory, honor, power, and authority of Christ.

Maybe the best illustration would be a champion sports team. When a team wins a championship, what do the fans chant? "We're number one!" Now think about that. The team could say, "What do you mean by 'we'?" We didn't see any of you in the weight room, or on the practice field, or in the game." The **team** won the championship – not the fans. So why do they say "we"? Because teams and fans have a common bond. In some sense they are in this together. In fact, a chief part of the joy of being an athlete and winning a championship is the joy of giving joy to the fans.

It is the same between us and our Lord. Christ has won the victory, but he invites us to share in the celebration. He did it for our salvation, and a great part of the joy of Christ in his eternal reign is sharing it with his bride. We can truly say, "We reign with him." This is what our Lord Jesus wants us to know about the home he is preparing for us.

Why does Jesus want us to know these things? Primarily to give us the desire and strength to persevere. Life in this world is often hard – the curse has deeply impacted our bodies, our work, and our relationships. Every aspect of life is negatively impacted in more ways than we know. We walk with heartaches and live with fears. But this vision reminds us that we have not been saved only for this life, but for the life to come. And that changes everything.

2 Cor. 4:16–18 (ESV)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.