

Are we there yet?

No one likes to wait! How many times has our family embarked on a car trip and the kids repeatedly asked, “Are we there yet?” Waiting is especially hard when what we can’t wait to experience is wonderful! Whether it’s a vacation destination, a visit with a friend, seeing a loved one after a long separation, or a fine meal when you are hungry... we, too, can find ourselves squirming with the same restless anticipation as children in the car.

Last week we talked about death and why - if we are God’s children – we need not fear what He is preparing for us! First Corinthians 2:9 says that “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”! As Marco Polo, the famous 13th century traveler lay dying, he was urged by his detractors to recant—to withdraw the seemingly far-fetched stories he had told about China and the lands of the Far East. But he refused, saying, “I have not told half of what I saw.” Paul was given a heavenly vision that was so incredible, Second Corinthians 12:7 says that he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited! Do you feel your anticipation building? I can too, and I can’t wait! In fact, are we there yet??



Fellowship

1. Take a few minutes talking about what you anticipate most about heaven.
2. Who do you know who is already there...awaiting your arrival?



Discipleship

I’ve heard many people use the phrase that “such and such a person was *so* heavenly minded they were of no earthly good.” You know, I have a problem with that, and I think Jesus did too! Paul tells us in Second Corinthians 4:18 to “*fix our eyes* not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Seventeenth century pastor Richard Baxter wrote:

“Why are not our hearts continually set on heaven? Why dwell we not there in constant contemplation? Bend thy soul to study eternity, busy thyself about the life to come...and let not those thoughts be seldom and cursory, but bathe thyself in heaven’s delights.”

The Scriptures are full of descriptions of our heavenly home, and we could spend days talking about them! But we'll whet our appetites for further study and try to catch a glimpse of what is the hope of every Christian! Let's look at who will be there, what will be there, and what will not be there. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Revelation, as we read portions of chapters 21 and 22.

First of all, who will be there? Chapter 21 verses 3 and 22 say,

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’ I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”

Chapter 22, verse 3 says, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

God will dwell with us, we will see Jesus face to face, and the Holy Spirit will permeate the very air of heaven!

Who else will be there? Loved ones who have died in the faith. From miscarried babies to children killed by drunk drivers; from the elderly who were ravished by the cruelty of Alzheimer's or cancer...to Christian parents you never really got to know. The most glorious of family reunions awaits; a time when we will never again have to say “goodbye”. Who else will be there? In First Thessalonians 2 Paul calls *those he's led to faith* his “hope, joy, and crown in which he will glory”. Imagine our joy when we meet those face to face who we've prayed for across the globe! From the persecuted Christians to the missionaries we've never met...our present labors through prayer will result in souls saved for all eternity with whom we'll have plenty of time to get to know!

Now that we know *who* will be there, *what* will be there?

A widely respected man known as “Uncle Johnson” died at the incredible age of 120. Perhaps his advanced years could be credited in part to the cheerful outlook that characterized his life. One day while at work in his garden, he was singing songs of praise to God. His pastor, who was passing by, looked over the fence and called, “Uncle Johnson, you seem very happy today.” “Yes, I was just thinking,” said the old man. “Thinking about what?” questioned his pastor. “Oh, I was just thinking that if the crumbs of joy that fall from the Master's table in this world are so good, what will the great loaf in glory be like?”

Look with me again to Revelation 21, as we read verses 1-2.

“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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

Now let's go to chapter 22:1-5.

“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 down 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. No 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There 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.”

Unparalleled beauty, light, brilliance, and splendor. Mansions our Master Carpenter has been preparing for thousands of years. Streets of gold, and jewels we can't even fathom. And, as if all that were not enough, the Lord will hand out rewards for our faithfulness on earth! It's a good thing we will also have eternal bodies, otherwise these present ones would be overcome with the wonder of it all! We will also be given the supreme honor of serving, praising, and reigning for all eternity with God! Those who characterize our lives in heaven as mindlessly strumming on harps and floating around as angels are not basing their theology on Scripture. We will be more productive than ever before, use our gifts and God-given personalities, and do work that will provide more fulfillment than you can imagine!

Let's turn our attention now to *what will not be there*. Read with me Revelation 21:6-8.

“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. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, and idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.’”

Now let's go to verse 27.

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

Hunger, thirst, shame, darkness, death, crying, mourning, pain, every kind of sin and impurity...all will be banished so that the brilliance of the glory of God and His holy city and people will shine forever! What makes your life miserable now? Fear? Crime? Guilt? Violence in your home? Scorn for your faith? Disease? Famine? Lack of friends? Take heart, brothers and sisters! The words Jesus has left you in the last two

chapters of His Word are meant for *your* personal encouragement! The hardships of earth are whetting our appetites for heaven!

Five months before his martyrdom in the 16th century, John Bradford wrote to a friend of the glories of heaven he anticipated:

“I am assured that though I lack here, I have riches there; though I hunger here, I shall have fullness there; though I faint here, I shall be refreshed there; and though I be accounted here as a dead man, I shall there live in perpetual glory. That is the city promised to the captives whom Christ shall make free; that is the kingdom assured to them whom Christ shall crown; there is the light that shall never go out; there is the health that shall never be impaired; there is the glory that shall never be defaced; there is the life that shall taste no death; and there is the portion that passes all the world’s preferment. There is the world that shall never wax worse; there is every want supplied freely without money; there is not danger, but happiness, and honor, and singing, and praise and thanksgiving unto the heavenly Jehovah, “to Him that sits on the throne,” “to the Lamb” that here was led to the slaughter, that now reigns - with whom I shall reign after I have run this comfortless race through this miserable earthly vale.”

Paul says in First Corinthians 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” But since we DO have a future hope for more...those who seek for His Kingdom and righteousness should be envied above all men.

A writer once asked billionaire Donald Trump about what horizons were left for him to conquer. “Right now, I’m genuinely enjoying myself,” Trump replied. “I work and I don’t worry.” “What about death?” the writer asked. “Don’t you worry about dying?” Trump gave his usual answer. “No,” he said. “I’m fatalistic and I protect myself as well as anybody can. I prepare for things.” This time, however, as Trump started walking up the stairs to have dinner with his family, he hesitated for a moment. “No,” he said finally, “I don’t believe in reincarnation, heaven or hell—but we go someplace.” Again, there was a pause. “Do you know,” he added, “I cannot, for the life of me, figure out where.”

What a contrast to the childlike faith of a little girl walking with her father. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed; “Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven (earth) is so beautiful, what must the right side be!”

It’s hard to wait! After all, we were made for another world! C.S. Lewis, in his timeless book Mere Christianity, wrote, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Heaven is more exciting than the best vacation, and you were made for it! So take some time now to chat within your small group and anticipate!



Ministry

3. Think of the most fulfilling job or hobby you've ever had. Does it encourage you to know you will be fruitful and productive for eternity?
4. It's been said, "Remember: If there is to be service there, the exercising ground is here. I do not know what we are in this world for, unless it is to apprentice us for heaven. Life on earth is bewilderment unless we are being trained here for a nobler work which lies beyond the grave." How can we take full advantage of this time of apprenticeship on the earth?
5. Read I Corinthians 15:19. Why does Paul claim that Christians are to be most pitied if there is no heaven?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. How strongly can you identify with his words in verse 4? In verse 8?
7. Read Revelation 21:10-25. What details are given about your heavenly home? How does it compare to your earthly home?



Evangelism

8. Do you expect to see souls you've won in Heaven? Why or why not?
9. What can you do differently (or more intensely) to assure you are storing up treasure in heaven?



Worship

10. We'll have eternity to praise Him, but let's practice now! Go around your group thanking God for the truths that He encouraged you with today...then end in a time of song or prayer.

