

**“Healing for the Nations”
Revelation 21:10, 22-27; 22:1-5**

10 And he (one of the angels) carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.

26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

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.

1 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 2 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.

3 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. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

5 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 forever and ever.

Introduction

What do you think about when you hear the word heaven? Christina, age 12 said, “In heaven, everything is free. Everyone lives in a mansion. No one has to go to work. There are no house payments.”

Nine year old Jake said, “The weather is nice. It never rains. Nothing can go wrong. My dad won’t have a scar in the middle of his head. We’ll be perfect.”

Who said this? A boy or a girl? “It’s where girls get turned into angels . . . and then God tries to do the best he can with the boys.”

Cara is 6 and said, “He’s sitting in a garden playing with the children and the animals and letting them climb on him.”

“There are no doctors or lawyers in heaven. . . . They don’t need them because God does all the healing and because all arguments are against the law.”

Ten year old Michael told that “Most people I know believe in heaven. . . . You might say that we’re just kids, but then maybe God just talks to us more often.” (you can see more kids’ comments on vimeo.com/24743675).

Most people believe in some kind of life after death, even if they aren't particularly religious or don't think about it very much because God has put within each of us an inner sense that life on earth isn't all there is. Remember Ecclesiastes 3: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die... God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart.”

We know there is life after death because God promised it, our souls bear witness to it. Most of all, Jesus Christ confirmed it by his life, death, and resurrection. By his resurrection, the Bible says, Jesus Christ destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Timothy 1:10).

How about you? What do we adults know, feel or say about heaven? The Book of Revelation and a few other parts of the Bible only give us images, metaphors, visions, approximations, parallels compared to life as we know it in this world. How do we, as children of God, see and understand Heaven?

I. Glory and Splendor

The vision in chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation is described by John in the greatest detail of any part of the book, precise and elaborate. An angel carried John away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed him the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. This unique spiritual experience makes clear that the New Jerusalem is the Church. This vital connection between the history of Israel and all those who believe in Israel's Messiah is unmistakable. The gates of the city have the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. The twelve foundations have the names of the Twelve Apostles inscribed. The glory and splendor of heaven can hardly be described.

John sees an immense city. The measurements translate to 1500 miles by 1500 miles (also 1500 miles high). Even by our sense of time, travel and distance, the New Jerusalem is a city beyond our imagination. It means that there will be enough room for all those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.” In Christ, *ta ethnos*, people from all ethnicities, the nations are honored and set free from the old competitions and fears.

Teilhard Chardin was a French idealist philosopher and Jesuit priest who died in New York City in 1955. He wrote from a modernist, Roman Catholic, Christian perspective. His friend, Aldous Huxley, was an English writer and philosopher who died in Los Angeles in 1963. He wrote from a secular, humanist point of view. Chardin once told Huxley that the problem with humanism is its shortsightedness. He assures his atheist friend that he plans to continue his research and writing on into eternity. Huxley wrote back with his hopeless thoughts, “Maybe this world is another planet's hell.”

II. Healing for All

“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.” Notice how closely Revelation parallels Ezekiel 47. The Sovereign Lord tells the prophet, “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

This is fantastic. It’s phenomenal. This last vision in Revelation is the best. Water of life, tree of life, fruitful and healing. John’s final discovery is the redemption that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. The curse has been reversed.

The last sign is the sign of hope. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God is able to forgive and heal. For the healing of the nations! When in Christ, centuries-old hatreds between peoples ancient and current are healed, reconciled. Believers, names written in the Book of Life, brothers and sisters in the redeemed family of God (can you imagine?) among the Jews and Greeks, the Hutu and Tutsi, Japanese and Koreans, Turks and Armenians, Native and European Americans, Bosnians and Croatians, Blacks and Whites/Hispanics/Asians in the USA. Healing for the nations! What a day that will be!

It was the classic scene: a capsized boat forces a group to swim to a nearby island, where they must fight to survive while hoping desperately for a rescue effort from civilization. You may have seen it in the news a week or two ago. Three men not only found themselves stranded on such an island, but digging trenches on the beach to spell out the giant letters “H-E-L-P.” It actually worked! A U.S. Navy plane saw the letters and notified nearby authorities to rescue them. The men

were waving their orange life jackets when the Navy plane spotted them on a small island several hundred miles north of Papua New Guinea. Two hours later, a small local boat picked them up and took them to a hospital.

Sometimes, even in everyday life, it can seem like our prayers to God are about as effective as spelling out giant letters in the sand, hoping somebody “up there” will see them. Yet Scripture tells us that God knows what we need, even before we ask—especially when we need to be rescued. And we need to be rescued!

John writes, “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” No need for sacrifice anymore. Jesus is the perfect, one of a kind, final and complete sacrifice, once for all. We have been rescued. The Bible says that “Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself... and we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (in Hebrews 9 and 10).

Conclusion

So, as we come to the Lord’s Table this morning, this Holy Communion with God and one another, what do you think now when you hear the word heaven? Tell your children and grandchildren about these images that only approximate the reality. A huge, amazing city; always drenched in the beautiful light of Christ; nothing hurtful, shameful, deceitful; refreshing, life-giving water; fruit from the Tree of Life; healing for all.

Let us pray together.

John 5:1-9

1 Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.