

Sermon Text for November 6, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Revelation 21:1-4, 21-25, John 14:1-4 ***“Heaven identified”***

We had a wonderful Trunk or Treat event last Sunday evening. We had more cars with candy than we have ever had and the neighborhood kids turned out in droves. It was awesome. What many of us do not realize is that Halloween is associated with a religious holiday, a Christian holiday that is called All Saints Day. On the first day of November every year it is a day when are called to remember and honor and give thanks for the saints who have gone before us and are now residing with Jesus in the promise of eternal life that we claim and upon which we stand with confidence.

Throughout my ministry here I have had quite a few of you, honestly more than in other places where I have served, that have wondered out loud what heaven is going to be like. Questions like is it real, is it a spiritual realm or a physical realm or both. Will we know our loved ones while when we all get to heaven. What about my pets. Will I know what is happening on earth when I am in heave. And the list goes on. People here tend to be genuinely curious about heaven and they expect and want their pastor to provide some biblically based answers to these questions.

We finished our read through the Bible series and so today we are going to start a two week series addressing heaven and trying to answer some of these questions. Today we begin with heaven identified and then next week we will look at heaven clarified which is basically clearing up any confusion that I may create this week. I tend to shy away from speaking too much about heaven. I focus on eternal life more, but really the two are identical. I guess this is important for us to understand. When I speak about eternal life, I am talking about heaven, when I am talking about heaven I mean also eternal life. But I do shy away from it because I have a concern that if we spend too much time thinking about what comes next we miss what is happening now.

You know that statement that you can be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good, yeah, well I want us to avoid that predicament. But our goal is to make each of us mature in Christ and part of that maturity is being equipped with as many truths of the faith as possible, including a correct understanding of what we believe about heaven. So this morning and next week we are going to look at how does Scripture identify and define heaven. We believe what

Scripture says and while it is fun and even exciting to create ideas about heaven which are not mentioned in Scripture, we are going to try to avoid those since they are not from God. Knowing the truth about heaven should provide some comfort for our loved ones and for ourselves if we have an accurate description. Let's read.

READ

Pearly gates and streets of gold: that description of heaven is actually found in the Bible. I had always thought that it was just another construct of our imagination, but we just read in Revelation a description of what this new heavenly city that God will bring will look like. It is in this chapter in Revelation that we find the most descriptive physical picture of heaven that we have in all of the Bible. Everything in heaven is going to be perfect including the architecture. What is more we read that there is going to be no need for the sun or the moon because the presence of God will be so bright and shiny. There will be no need for a church because the presence of Christ will be continuous and so we merely have to be in his presence without even trying.

The physical description of heaven that we have laid out for us in Revelation is one of pearly gates, that are always open by the way. Don't let that fact slip by you. What does it mean that the gates are always open? It means that the grace of God is without limit. The streets of gold that are transparent, it is a picture of perfection in every physical way possible. We have this picture consistently in Scripture of a new city and in that city a mansion nor a house with many rooms or lodgings as we read in the Gospel of John. We see a similar description in II Corinthians 5:1 where we read a description of what we will become: "we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens." And while this may be describing our physical body, we see this consistency in Scripture of heaven being physically defined as a location, as a place, as a house a mansion nestled within a perfect city.

Some would see heaven as merely a spiritual construct, what I find in Scripture is a literal physical location, a house or a mansion or a dwelling place within a brand new perfectly designed city. So, simply said, if you need an answer to is there a heaven, I say yes, and this is what it looks like. Also, and this is really important, there is only one heaven. There are not multiple heavens or multiple levels. I know some of you have told me that you believe that there are different levels for those who have done well on earth, more than one of you have told me that you believe that.

That is not Scriptural, and as I said last week about culture who lies to us when it tells us that what happens to us here on this earth is dictated by how much God loves us. If good things happen to us then we are in God's favor and if bad things happen to us then we are out of God's favor. That is a lie, remember when we talked about that last week? Well, this concept of levels of heaven or people getting more jewels in their crown than others because of their work here on earth, that is also a lie based upon that very same premise. Our sense of fairness is that each person should get what they deserve in heaven based upon their life. What Scripture and our faith states is that Jesus judges us based upon the work that he did on the cross and not based upon the work that we have done on this earth. It is that simple.

There is an unquestionable inclusivity to access to heaven. God so loved the entire world, the gates are wide open. But there is an exclusivity to heaven in that it is predicated upon Christ and Christ alone as being the way. There is no other way to heaven except through Jesus. If Jesus isn't your God, then heaven is not for you. Remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross? Today you will be with me in paradise. Today, you will be with me in heaven. That thief walked into those pearly gates just like everyone else in that same single heaven that we will one day be in with our Savior Jesus Christ.

So the physical description of heaven that we find is a house within a city as Jesus describes in the Gospel of John. But for me the physical description of what exactly heaven will look like is far less important than knowing and understanding what will heaven be like when we are there. Look at vs.3 in Revelation where we read the most important aspect of heaven. He will dwell with them, he will be with them. We have read elsewhere in Scripture, in Isaiah for example that we are promised Emmanuel, God with us born to a virgin. Not a mediator born to a virgin, but God with us born to a virgin. We find that played out on Christmas morning in Luke where Jesus is described as Emmanuel and again in the Gospel of John where we read that the Word was God, Jesus our Savior is God.

In our second reading for today we find that theme repeated again in vs.3 – Where I am, there you will be also. The most important aspect of heaven for all of us is that we will be with Christ forever while we are there. You can let other argue about what it will look like physically or even if it physically exists, I say yes, but the most important aspect of heaven that you need to take with you is the indwelling of Christ with us while in heaven for the rest of our lives. This means, look at vs.4 of Revelation, that there will be no more pain or suffering or crying or

weeping. We read in I Corinthians 15 that our bodies will be perfect and without blemish or corruption.

Because we are in the presence of Christ in a perfect city in a mansion prepared for us by him, then all things will be perfect. Abiding in Christ, living in Christ, dwelling in Christ means being fully in the presence of God. That brings us to communion for today. This is a glimpse of what heaven will look like. Now, this is not a perfect Borough in which we find ourselves. This is not a perfect church in which we are family members. Our bodies are broken and frail, but we come to the table assured and hopeful of the promises of Scripture that one day Christ will take him to us and we will be with him in paradise, in heaven, for eternity. We believe that. Christ is present in communion in a very real spiritual way. What we do around this table isn't just a memorial, it is a recognition that Christ is truly present with us as a glimpse into what heaven will be like.