Tutor Ethan Schultz, Guest Preacher

Sunday, April 7, 2024

Second Sunday of Easter

Revelation 21:1-7

**Heaven is Real**

Easter is all about realities. It’s Jesus appearing in that room and letting his disciples *touch* his hands. It’s real. Easter is real and it brings other very real blessings, one of those being heaven. And this morning, we’re going to talk about heaven. I don’t think anyone will be opposed if we focus our attention on that this morning, will they? It’s fun talking about heaven! It’s exciting! On top of that,  there’s some uncertainty and misconceptions among Christians about what exactly heaven is.  And I think we can do better than saying, “We’ll just have to see once we get there.” Let’s see the reality of heaven *right now* from God’s Word.

To do that, we’re going to say what heaven is and what heaven is not. Starting with what heaven is *not,* I’ve got three for you, three things that heaven is *not.*

**Here’s the first one: heaven is not a spiritual fantasy.** If you do a Google image search for heaven, you’ll see things like clouds and bright light. Maybe a misty staircase leading up to the clouds. It’s pictures of nothing, thin air. Why do we Christians have this picture stuck in our minds? Will our souls just float around in the clouds like angels, in some sort of spiritual ether? Maybe the reason we have airy ideas of heaven is because we don’t have a good idea of what heaven really is.

So, we need to be clear on what happens when a believer dies. The body dies. The soul goes to heaven to be with Jesus. But you know that’s not the end of the story. And here’s where it gets good: there is a future reality beyond that. The real hope isn’t just heaven... our souls with Jesus… it’s a new creation. And Easter is the perfect time for this to blow our minds. Because just like Jesus’ body, our bodies will not stay dead forever. On Judgment Day our bodies will be reunited with our souls. And our new, glorified bodies will not live in the clouds, but in the new creation.

That’s what heaven is. **It’s a real world.** It’s not a spiritual fantasy. John sees a real world. Not clouds and spiritual mist, but a new heaven and a new earth. A new earth to walk on and a new sky to marvel at. Green grass to lie down on and a blue sky to fly a kite. As real as real can be. And what about the world we’re standing on right now? Passed away. Gone! And John’s not surprised by that... he’s not frantically searching for it. He knew it had to pass away – Jesus said so! It was rotting and decaying with sin; it could never be the eternal home for God’s people.

**Here’s the second one: Heaven is not living with sin.** Heaven is going to be perfect. But I’ve never experienced perfection, so it’s hard for me to talk about it. It makes me think of Augusta National, the golf course where the Masters will be hosted this week. You know how people talk about that course? They don’t just say it’s perfect. They say what it’s not. Yes, the fairways are perfect, but people will say, “There’s not a single weed or pine needle out of place.” That’s perfection. Sometimes it’s easier to say what’s not there. And that’s how it’s described in John’s vision. Heaven is perfect. It’s a world without *death or mourning or crying or pain***.** Papercuts and prescriptions. Car crashes and chemotherapy. Misdiagnosis and miscarriage. Heaven isn’t any of those things. That’s the old order of things.

What is placed before John’s eyes is something totally new. And you have to catch this yourself; it’s beautiful. John sees the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from the sky, and it’s the most beautiful sight he’s ever seen. Like a bride bursting through the doors of the sanctuary on her wedding day. You’ve been there. When the bride enters, and all eyes are on her... on her radiant smile, flowing dress. I’m imagining John with his mouth wipe open, speechless. And it’s almost as if that angel had to wave his hand in front of John’s eyes and tell him what he’s actually looking at. The angel says, **“*Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God*.”**

That’s what heaven is. **It’s living with God.** Look with John and gaze at the New Jerusalem. What you’re seeing is believers living with God in all his undiminished glory. And the people aren’t falling over dead, either! They are so alive - they are living in a city, where people do life with God, just as he intended. A world where people look at God face to face, hug him chest to chest, sit down and have a conversation with him like two friends catching up over coffee.

**And now we’re at the third one: heaven is not too good to be true.**  If I were John, I might be seeing this all and thinking it was too good to be true. Almost like when you’re asleep and having a really good dream, but realize it’s too good to be true and you wake up. Do you feel that? Some of you may feel so boxed in by your far-from-perfect reality right now that heaven seems too good to be true. What feels most real to you right now is the guilt of sin, the loss of loved ones, emotional and physical pain, unimaginable stress. Whatever it may be, you’ve felt it. Sin and suffering are so real, that heaven can seem too good to be true.

But for John, the dream doesn’t stop; the vision keeps going. A familiar voice calls out to John, **“*I am making everything new*.”** Whose voice is this that calls from heaven’s throne? It is the same voice that called out to John on a Sunday evening years earlier. John was in a locked room, boxed in by fear and suffering. That was his reality. But then that same voice broke into his reality and gave him something new. Jesus appeared and said, “Peace be with you.” Don’t you see? The voice of the risen Lord changes reality. It takes a locked room filled with fear and floods it with joy. And Thomas who was not there, thought it too good to be true. Until he himself heard that voice: “Peace be with you.”

The risen Lord has the power to make everything new. Like King Midas, who had the power to change anything to gold just by touching it. That’s Greek mythology, but there’s another king, King Messiah who makes everything new. King Messiah touches a sinful heart and makes it new. King Messiah touches the old creation and makes a whole new one. Heaven is not too good to be true, because King Messiah has made it yours. That’s what heaven is. It’s yours. Heaven is real and it’s yours.

And that means something for you right now. For one, it means that **you can live in peace in your current reality**. Right now, even in your far-from-perfect reality, you can live in peace. Because you have the words of your risen Lord. He made sure that you heard them today. He told John, **“Write these words down. They are trustworthy and true.”** These words are not too good to be true. They are words to hold on to. Words that tell you that right now you are victorious. Right now, you are an heir of this beautiful inheritance. And all of the sin and suffering that you are facing right now will one day pass away forever.

And finally, this means that **you can get lost in the world that is coming your way**. Before this morning, when was the last time you thought about heaven? When’s the last time you saw yourself living there? I’ll be honest, I don’t know how often I think about it, probably not enough. This world can weigh so heavy on us that we can forget about the world to come. We get stuck in this reality and can feel so hopeless.

And if you feel stuck, then you need this of heaven to shake you loose from this sinful world and open your eyes to the world to come. A real world, with no sin, living with Jesus forever. And that changes the way we live now. We can live in the peace that Jesus gives, not fearing death or pain because those things are passing away. But life in the new creation will never end.

It’s okay to get lost in that very real world. Get away from the stress and anxiety of the here and now and get lost thinking about how beautiful that world is going to be. Think about a world where you can have a garden without any weeds – what will that be like? Get lost thinking about what living in a body without any pain, or seeing perfectly without glasses. Get lost thinking about all the different family and friends you will get to meet up with again. Thinking about all the characters from the Bible you want to meet in heaven... do you want to meet Ruth and Naomi? Moses? King David? The criminal hanging next to Jesus?

The possibilities are endless. But really, I should say, the realities are endless. Because if heaven is one thing, it’s real. And it’s yours.