

May 22, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Heaven is Your Home!

Its beauty defies description

Its beauty gives encouragement

No one can accuse Jesus of false advertising. He never promised a heaven on earth. There are a good number of false churches, however, which tell people that IF they pray hard enough and do the right things, then life on earth will be one happy moment after another. I hear the same thing in many graduation speeches. *“We worked hard to graduate and if we keep working hard, there are no limits to what we can do.”* Reality is that no matter how hard we try, things do not always turn out the way you would like. We live in a broken world filled with struggles, sorrows and sadness. Jesus did not promise a heaven on earth. Just a few hours before he was crucified, Jesus told his disciples (Jn 16:22), **“Now is your time of grief.”** The Apostle Paul said (Ac 14.22), **“we must go through many hardships.”** Jesus compared going from life on earth to life in heaven as a woman giving birth. What other event could compare to such intense pain followed by overwhelming joy and happiness? Life on earth is often painful, but it will be followed by amazing gladness when we enter heaven. This morning we are reminded that heaven is your home. Its beauty defies description and its beauty gives encouragement.

#### Its beauty defies description

If you have seen the Alps in Europe, or the Rocky Mountains, or even the Appalachian Mountains, you have been touched by their magnificent beauty. How would you describe such breathtaking mountain views to someone who has not seen anything higher than Holy Hill? *“They’re really, really big,”* just doesn’t work, does it? No picture or description can capture their glorious splendor. How could the Lord describe heaven for us who have only have this world as a point of reference? No earthly description could suffice. Still, our Lord wants us to grasp in some small way how amazing heaven will be. So, he pulled back the invisible curtain separating heaven from earth and gave the Apostle John a vision of heaven. The book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, is a vision – think of it as a very powerful dream – not a technical description of heaven as if God was giving a precise blueprint of heaven. The Holy Spirit wanted to touch our hearts with things that our mind can not fully comprehend, a beauty that defies description.

In Revelation 7, John described heaven as a majestic city. He wrote (:21), **“The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.”** Pearls are expensive jewelry, the larger the pearl, the more valuable. Can you imagine a pearl so large that you could carve a doorway through it? They are repaving the street in front of our church this week. How valuable would N. Grant St. be if they paved it with pure gold? If the streets of heaven are paved with gold, how much more valuable is the rest of heaven?

John continued (:22), **“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”** The Temple in Jerusalem symbolized God’s presence. When we see God himself, we will no longer need a symbolic building. Verse 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.”** Through God’s power, light shined in the world before there was a sun. The same power of God will illuminate heaven. Think of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when his face shined as bright as the sun. Verses 24-26, **“The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.”** The citizens of heaven will come from every nation, tribe, language and people of the earth. All who trust in Jesus as their Savior regardless of age, gender, race or color will be in heaven. The world’s most magnificent rulers will be servants of the Lord. I’ve read that Queen Victoria of England about 150 years ago wished Judgement Day would come during her lifetime so that she could take off her royal crown and lay it at the feet of Jesus. Ancient cities with walls around them would close the city gates at night to keep the people safe. In heaven, the gates will always be open since heaven is not subject to attack. All of her enemies will be confined to hell. The glory of God and the Lamb will provide the light and safety and security of the city.

Verses 27 gives us pause, though. **“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful.”** Are you perfectly pure? I’m not. Have you ever done anything shameful or deceitful? Is there something you said or did that you wish you would not have? Do selfish, harsh, hateful or lustful thoughts ever race through your mind? None of us have what it takes to get into heaven. Before you despair, though, notice how Jesus is described in verse 22. He is described as a **lamb**, an innocent animal that was sacrificed to pay for the sins of people. For 1400 years, God’s people placed their hands on the head of a lamb, symbolically transferring their sin to the lamb, which was then slaughtered and burned up on the altar in front of the Temple. The blood of a barnyard animal can not take away our sins, though. Those Old Testament sacrifices were only symbols of what would happen to Jesus. All of your sins – every dirty deed, every unloving word, every shameful thought – were blamed on Jesus. As the perfect God-Man, Jesus’ death was able to take wash away every sinful spot on your record. You are forgiven. Even though we are sinners through and through, because of Jesus, God declares you to be pure, perfect, in his sight. God calls you a saint, a holy person. You can get into heaven.

Verse 27 also says that those in heaven are, **“those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”** When God put together his check list for this world, before he spoke and commanded light and the whole universe to appear, he paused and wrote your name down in the Book of Life. The Book of Life is a term that the Bible uses to describe the list of those who will be in heaven. You could think of it as the roll call for God’s elect. Before you were born, God determined your destiny. Since he put your name in his Book of Life before he created the world, then it also happened before you were born, before you could do anything. You had absolutely nothing to

do with coming to faith and getting to heaven. God did it all for you. God chose you to be saved and made sure that you came into contact with the gospel. If salvation depended on us in any way, we would never be sure that we were saved. But since God did it all for you, you can be sure that you are saved. That saving love of God is what the Bible calls grace. It is impossible to wrap our minds around the descriptions of heaven – gates of pearl, streets of gold, perfect peace, etc. It is even more impossible to grasp the height and length and depth of God’s grace. God’s grace makes heaven a certain thing for you. God wrote the name of each and every one of you in the Book of Life. You are saved. Alleluia!

#### Its beauty gives encouragement.

Heaven is certain, but we’re not in heaven yet, are we? The certainty of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, gives us strength to hang on to him as our Savior and endure whatever troubles and trials we face on this this earth. We know what is waiting for us. Prisoners of war who endured severe physical and mental abuse say that they survived because they stayed focused on being reunited with their loved ones. An athlete pushes himself to practice even though he is tired and sore because he is dreaming of winning the game, or race. When I had some serious health issues and doctors could figure out what was wrong, it felt as if I did not have a future. One doctor, though, touched me on the shoulder, looked in my eyes and said, “It’s going to get better.” He still did not have the answers for what was going on, but he gave me hope. The darkest place of all is when you do not have any hope and you do not see any future. It’s scary, very scary. That’s, especially, when the resurrection of Jesus shines brightest in our hearts. If Jesus loved you enough to live, die and rise for you as an individual, then you can be sure that he still loves you and that he will take care of you and that he will eventually will take you to himself in heaven.

The book of Revelation, by itself, is a reminder of God’s love. We do not need the book of Revelation in order to be saved. The book does not give any new doctrines. Everything we need to know about Jesus and our salvation is completely covered in the first 65 books of the Bible. Still, in love, the Lord gave the Apostle John this vision in Revelation to encourage you. He knew that there were going to be dark days in your life. What more could sinners living in a sinful world expect? The Lord knew that there were going to be times in your life

- when you would be in a dark place,
- when you would not see any future or have any hope,
- when you would feel unloved,
- when you would feel that your best efforts do not make any difference,
- when you would feel worthless,
- when you would be worn out,
- when you would feel lonely even though you are surrounded by people,
- when you would need some encouragement,

and so he inspired John to write down his vision of heaven and then preserve that message through 2000 years of persecution so you could be encouraged this morning. The beauty of your heavenly home can encourage you no matter what circumstances you are dealing with.

Garrison Keillor (popular author and radio personality) once told the story about a family who was down on their luck. In the fictitious small town of Lake Wobegon in northern Minnesota, a girl named Grace married a guy who was new to town. They had three children. Tragically, he had a drinking problem. When the youngest child was just a few months old, he abandoned his wife and family. Grace was left to raise three children by herself. They ended up living in a mobile home with plywood siding. Their clothes and furniture were what other people got rid of because they were worn out. Simply surviving each day was a struggle for Grace.

One day, Grace got a letter in a large manila envelope that looked very official. A man in Philadelphia was researching Scottish nobility and he asked them a few questions about their family history. They replied and several weeks later, received another official letter saying that, indeed, they were the first in the line of succession of the House of Stuart, the royal family of Scotland. In the 1600’s, England invaded and in 1707, became a part of Great Britain, governed by the king or queen of England. There is no Scottish royalty now, but if Scotland ever became its own country again, Grace and her children would be first in line to sit on the royal throne in Edinburgh, Scotland. Every so often, Grace would get another official letter discussing more about their ancestry and Scottish history. Those letters made all the difference for Grace and her family. Even though they were still dirt poor, they held their chins up a bit higher. Even though people would point at them and gossip as they walked down the street, they found great joy, pride and encouragement knowing that they were truly royalty even though others did not see it or believe it. They had hope.

In Garrison Keillor’s story, it turns out that those letters were fraudulent, an effort by someone who was trying to give Grace hope in a seemingly hopeless life. The Bible is not a fraud. Heaven is a physical reality and God has adopted you into his royal family. Life in this world can be dark and difficult, but heaven will not disappoint. Joy will come after the pain of this world. No matter how healthy or wealthy you are, no matter what others say or think about you, no matter how you feel, you can hold your chin up and smile knowing that you are God’s chosen child. It is difficult for earthbound mortals to grasp how awesome heaven will be. Its beauty defies description, but its beauty certainly gives you encouragement no matter what you are going through. Jesus is your risen Savior and heaven is your home. Amen.