

**"Heaven: The Fullness of God's Glory"**  
**(Revelation 21:1-7)**  
**Pastor Woohyun Jung**  
**March 11, 2018**

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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. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "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. <sup>4</sup>'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

<sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

<sup>6</sup>He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

*Core Issue:* Heaven is a place where you will experience the fullness of God's glory and see Him face to face. In His presence, we will be made like Him and taste life as it was meant to be. Knowing this truth will radically change the way we live our lives today.

*Opposing Value:* We don't long for heaven because many of us are too content and comfortable with our lives today.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good afternoon church. It's good to see all of you here. Children, we're so glad that you're joining us today. I hope that you'll open your hearts and ears to hear what God has in store for you. Last Sunday, we started a short two-week sermon series on **heaven and hell**. I shared that **hell is a real place of eternal punishment inflicted by the just wrath of God**. If you missed it, I encourage you to listen to it online. Today, we'll finish the series by talking about heaven.

## WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HEAVEN?

**What's your understanding of heaven?** What would you say to your non-believing friend who asks, "What's heaven like? Why should I desire heaven?" Would you say that heaven is a beautiful city made up of gold; a place in the sky with houses built with clouds? Some of you are thinking of somewhere white and bright; a place where everyone will fly with their wings on their back. Some of you may imagine a place where God, angels, His people, and all the animals live in harmony.

Now, let me ask you a more important question: **where did you get these ideas?** Why do you think that heaven will be what you described it to be? **The truth is that many of us have a difficult time coming up with a clear description of heaven; and even if we do, we're unsure of its source.** The Bible tells us that heaven is the future destination for Christians yet our knowledge of it is very limited and even distorted. If we're honest to ourselves, some of us have never even thought of heaven. We're not really interested. We don't really care. And as a result, most of us have never really longed for heaven. Why is that the case? **Why is the doctrine of heaven neglected?**

**One reason may be that we're too preoccupied with this present world.** In other words, we're too busy. We don't have much time to think about heaven because we're consumed by our work, school, duties at home, and entertainment. Imagine this. If I take a loonie and hold it close to my eye, all I'll see is nothing but the loonie because it blocks out everything else from my vision. Without the coin, I could see the sun, trees, and the people that I love. But because the coin is so close that it prevents me from seeing something incomparably greater and far more important. I'm not saying that the daily realities of life are not important. But we must recognize the danger that the very closeness of this world can have on us.

**Another reason can be that we're too comfortable.** For the most part we're comparatively rich, reasonably healthy, and relatively happy. Not only that, we live in a world of instant gratification. We have access to so many things with the click of a mouse. We have credit cards allowing us to own what we can't afford, go where we wouldn't be able to go, and do what would otherwise be impossible for us. We live by the motto: "I want *what* I want *when* I want it." We think we have everything we need here and now. But as a result, we forget that we are called to be strangers in this world. Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20, "*Our citizenship is in heaven.*" The very comfort of this world has dried up our hunger for heaven.

**Last reason may be because we don't find heaven appealing.** John Eldredge, a Christian author, wrote, "Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service. We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever. And our hearts sink. 'Forever and ever? That's the good news?' And then we sigh and feel guilty that we're not more spiritual. We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can." Maybe some of you have thought this – and you can't help but to think that heaven sounds like a boring place.

If this is true, the goal of my message is this: **to help you recover that longing by giving you a **Biblical understanding of heaven**.** Our source of understanding heaven must be the Bible. That being said, turn with me to Revelation 21:1-7 and follow along as I read it for us.

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “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. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.”*

I want to approach this message by answering three questions:

- What is heaven? (v. 1-4)
- How does this truth impact us? (v. 5-6)
- How should we respond? (v. 6-7)

### **1) WHAT IS HEAVEN?**

In this passage, we’re reaching the climax of not only the book of Revelation, but the whole story of salvation narrated in the Bible. Just before this, John told us how the Lamb of God returned and led the Last Battle to victory; how God justly sentenced all the sinners, Satan, and all his demons to the eternal Lake of Fire; and how Death has now been defeated and evil is no more. With this in mind, take a look at our passage again. It’s an incredible picture. “*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.*” What does he mean by this?

**In order to understand this properly, we must define the terms clearly.** When John talks about *the first heaven and earth*, he’s referring to the heaven and earth as we know it today. Heaven is where God, angels, and the dead saints live while earth is where we live. But what John is saying is that when Jesus comes back again, the first heaven and earth will pass away and a new heaven and earth will be established. And this is how it’ll happen: the Holy City, the New Jerusalem will come down to be joined with the renewed earth. In other words, **heaven and earth will become one, and in this new earth, we will live forever.** Then the climax of this salvation story is not us rising up and escaping this world – what we have is the heaven coming down and transforming the earth. A common misconception that many of us have is the fact that we’ll live in heaven forever. But this is not completely accurate. It’s true that we’ll be with the Lord forever but not in the present heaven as we know it; but rather in *the new heaven and earth* in our resurrected bodies.

This may be very shocking to you, but this is what evangelical Christians believe about heaven. Pastor Anthony Hoekema says, “The New Jerusalem does not remain in a heaven far off in space, but it comes down to the renewed earth; there the redeemed will spend eternity in resurrection bodies. So heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with His people.” I know this may sound so foreign to us but it’s because many of us really never took the time to closely study the Scripture. **Then what will this new heaven and earth be like?** Let me just give you three descriptions and we’ll spend a bulk of our time here.

**First, heaven is a place of God’s glory.** Revelation 21:23 says, “*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.*” John tells us that in heaven, there’s no need for any other source of light because God’s glory will illuminate the whole place. **Heaven is where God’s magnificence is fully revealed; His unimaginable splendor and beauty will be made known.** In other words, you’ll be so mesmerized by His glory that it’ll leave you stunned and speechless. You’ll be so satisfied with His presence that you won’t desire anything else.

Now, you may have encountered a number of books where the author claims that he/she has visited heaven. An interesting thing that Pastor John MacArthur points out is that they say very little about the glory of God. But all of them have a lot to say about how good they felt – how peaceful, how happy, and how comforted they were; how they received gifts and compliments; and how fun and enlightening their experience was. In short, they highlight everything but what’s truly important in heaven.

This is very different from what we read in the Scripture. Those who had a heavenly vision focus firmly on God and the glory that surrounds God’s throne. And in every instance, the person who sees a heavenly vision is greatly frightened – fully aware of his own insignificance, guilt, and fallenness. Let me give you a few examples. Ezekiel 1:28 says, “*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown.*” Isaiah 6:5 says, “*‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’*” Daniel 10:8 says, “*So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.*” Then Revelation 5:11 says, “*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand... In a loud voice they were saying: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’*” No one who truly witnessed heaven would ever come back to earth talking about anything else other than God. Furthermore, no one would ever grow tired of worshiping God for His glory will completely capture our hearts with such weight.

It’s essential that we make this absolutely clear before we move on. **If we don’t, our whole concept of heaven will be poisoned by self-centeredness – being interested in heaven only for what we hope to get out of it.** We should never think of heaven by asking, “What’s in it for me?” **Heaven exists ultimately for God, and apart from God it has no meaning.** Think about a wedding. As you’re walking down the aisle to the person you’ll be spending the rest of your life with, you’re not thinking, “I hope that cake tastes good.” Your focus is on one person: the future spouse-to-be. That’s what heaven is going to be like. When you’re in heaven and in the sweet presence of God, you won’t be asking, “What do I look like? What kind of house am I going to live in? Are there animals? Is there music? Is there sports?” You’ll be in awe of His glory.

**Second, heaven is a place where God will make Himself fully visible.** 1 John 3:2 says, “*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*” What John is saying is this: “We don’t know what we’re going to be; we don’t have all the details of what heaven is going to be like; but one thing we know is that we’ll be like Him and we shall see Him as *He is.*” The Bible promises us that we’re going to be able to see not an indirect manifestation of God like a burning bush or a pillar of cloud but we’re going to see Him face to face in heaven. This is shocking because we know that in the OT, there was always a limit to what people were allowed to see. Even Moses, who was called the friend of God, could not see the face of God – he only saw the passing of His glory. The Bible makes it clear that no one will see the face of God lest they perish. But the doctrine of heaven tells us that this is going to be reversed – one day we will see Him.

**How is this made possible?** Jesus explains in Matthew 5:8, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*” The reason why we can’t see God is not because there’s something wrong with our eyes or because God has something to hide from us. **The reason why we can’t see God is because there’s something wrong with our hearts.** But when we enter into God’s glory and receive the fullness of our sanctification and glorification, that present barrier which makes it impossible for us to have a direct and immediate encounter with God will be removed, because we’ll be made pure by the work of Christ on the cross.

There’s a book called *The Happiness of Heaven* written in 1871, where we read of a king who finds a blind orphan boy while hunting in a forest. The king takes the boy to his palace, adopts him as his son, and provides for his care. The boy is extremely grateful, and he loves the king, his new father, with all his heart. When the boy turns twenty, a surgeon performs an operation on his eyes, enabling him to see for the first time in his life. As the boy looks around, he’s most overwhelmed to see the father he loves. **Brothers and sisters, this kind of joy is what we’ll experience (and more) when we see God face to face – we’ll be overwhelmed by His indescribable beauty.**

**Lastly, heaven is a place of no suffering.** Let’s read verse 4. “*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*” All of us understand what suffering is. You feel like you’ve got this huge weight on your shoulders. Maybe even right now, you’re facing financial burdens, relationship breakdowns, physical sickness, or other pains. You’re hopeless because of this brokenness that you see everywhere. **Friends, God promises us that everything will be made new in heaven – and you won’t find a hint of pain, suffering, sin, or death in heaven.** It’s going to be a perfect place that we’ve all been waiting for.

I still remember this one pastor who spoke at one of our March Retreats. To be honest, I don’t remember his name or what he talked about. But I still remember the skit that he performed. He acted out a person who was suffering from cerebral palsy or some kind of movement disorder. So he wasn’t able to move. He wasn’t able to speak. The play started with him sitting in a wheelchair. And the song, “I Can Only Imagine” came on. For those of you who are not familiar with the song, it’s about imagining what it would be like to meet God in heaven.

Let me read you the lyric: “*I can only imagine what it will be like when I walk by your side | I can only imagine what my eyes will see when you face is before me | surrounded by Your glory | what will my heart feel | will I dance for you or in awe of You be still | will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall | will I sing hallelujah or will I be able to speak at all | I can only imagine.*” As the song went on, the pastor began to slowly move, stand up, jump, smile, laugh, cry, walk, run, sing, and shout Hallelujah – re-enacting what it would be like to be in the presence of God with his resurrected body. It was a powerful and emotional skit. The Bible tells us that in heaven, we’ll have glorified bodies which are not subject to the effects of aging, injury, illness, or death. Maybe some of you are thinking, “What will I look like? Will I be in my teens, 20s, 30s, or 40s?” Honestly, I don’t know. **But one thing I do know is that we will be made perfect because we’ll be made like Jesus.**

**Heaven is a place of God’s glory, a place where God will make Himself fully visible, and a place of no suffering.** I hope that you find this incredibly amazing and desirable. But we’ve only scratched the surface of what heaven is like. I strongly encourage all of you to study the Bible and read great books on heaven. Your hearts will be captured by its beauty.

## 2) HOW DOES THIS TRUTH IMPACT US?

In order for us to answer this question, we must first understand to whom this book was written. **John first wrote this book for a group of churches that were facing some terrible things.** He was writing to people who were about to experience death, mourning, crying, and pain. End of first century, the Roman Emperor Domitian executed a widespread persecution of Christians. They had their homes taken away and plundered; they were sent into the arena to fight the wild beasts; and they were crucified as the crowd watched. They lived in fear every single day, wondering if today will be their last. **Now, what did John say to them so they can face this?** He didn’t say, “Run away!” or “Let’s gather people to fight!” No, John told them about the new heaven and new earth. **He wanted this truth to enable them to face this persecution and pain.** He wanted this truth to bring comfort and hope to their hearts. And that’s exactly what happened – these Christians took their suffering with boldness. They sang hymns as they were being killed by the beasts and they forgave those who persecuted them. **Now, in the same way, knowing this truth about heaven will enable us to face things that otherwise we wouldn’t be able to face knowing that God will be victorious at the end.** No matter how difficult it is now, we’ll persevere. Pastor John MacArthur said, “The person who knows that his destiny is glorious and certain will be free to live the most radical life of love and sacrifice here on earth.”

**Brothers and sisters, God always comforts us with the truth.** In other words, God is inviting us to think about the truth; consider the truth; and reflect on the truth. And we know that we’re not banking on words that are uncertain. **We can trust these words because we know who spoke them** – He’s the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. When He says it’s done, it’s as if they’ve already become a reality. That’s exactly why God says to John in verse 5, “*Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.*” He wanted John to remember by writing it down and we must do the same.

**At this time, I want to address the children.** So, children, I know you waited a long time. I want to tell you a story. Over 60 years ago, there was a girl named Florence Chadwick. She was a swimmer. One day, she decided to swim from Catalina Island to the shore of California which was just a little over 40 km. She was accompanied by two boats to protect her from sharks and help her if she got tired. After swimming for 15 hours, a thick fog set in. She couldn't see anything. So, Florence asked herself, "How much longer? I'm tired. I can't see the coastline. I don't think I can make it." After swimming for another hour, she was physically and emotionally exhausted. So she asked to be pulled out. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered the coastline was just over a kilometer away. At a news conference the next day she said, "All I could see was the fog. If I could've seen the shore, I would've persevered through it to the end."

We can learn something from this story. **Our life is like a race.** And like all race, sometimes it's going to get hard. We get tired. Loving God and serving Him isn't as easy as you thought. But this is why we must remember heaven. When we don't give up and finish the race, we'll get to be with God forever in heaven. We'll enjoy good food with Him, we'll go for a walk with Him, and we'll sing great songs with Him. This is what we can look forward to. Did you know that this is what Jesus did for us? Hebrews 12:2 says, "*For the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross.*" Even though it was hard, Jesus endured the pain so that God would be happy and we would be happy in Him. We must follow His example. We should "*run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith*" (Heb. 12:2-3). If you forget everything else, just remember this: **let us finish the race by fixing your eyes on heaven.** Thank you, children. Everyone else, I pray the same for all of you as well because when we lose sight of our final destination, we'll give in to the temptation to give up and compromise. Let the truth of heaven keep you strong and determined on your journey with God.

### 3) HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Let's turn to verse 6. God says, "*To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.*" This reminds us of John 4 where Jesus says to the woman at the well: "Drink from Me and you'll never be thirsty again." Of course, Jesus was talking about spiritual life. He was saying, "If you receive the life I give you, the deepest longing of your soul will be satisfied in Me." **And the amazing thing is that this water of life is for free because someone already paid that cost for us. That's the gospel.** All of us were absolutely hopeless. We were all deserving of death because of our sin and we had no way of making things right again. We were under the power of death and what awaited us was the eternal judgment of God. We were thirsty yet we had no way to pay for that water of life. The gospel tells us that Jesus paid the cost for us. **How do we know this?** In John 19:28, as Jesus hung on the cross, He said, "*I am thirsty.*" **On the cross, Jesus Christ substituted His place for us; and as He felt this hopelessness and spiritual thirst, we were given a free access to the water of life.** Jesus lost everything so that we could have everything.

At this time, I want to speak to those who haven't placed their hope in Jesus. Friends, this water of life is available for you. All you need to do is simply place your hope in Christ. Everything else will disappoint and fail you, maybe not right now but one day for sure because you will face death. But listen to what 1 Corinthians 15:55 says: "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Jesus has overcome death. And His victory can be ours when we trust Him. Without Christ there is no hope of heaven. So, I invite you to come to Him today.

Let me speak to the believers. I want to share three things we should do as a response to this truth. **First, set our mind and heart on heaven.** Paul says in Colossians 3:1, *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* We must be heavenward. This means that we must earnestly, passionately, and deliberately get rid of our worldliness – our love for earthly things and values. It means that we are looking ahead to eternity and living in the expectation of a sure and certain hope.

**Second, experience a richer and deeper fellowship with God today.** The amazing thing about the doctrine of heaven is that we can live in heaven’s glory here and now, with our hearts fixed on heaven. This is true because heaven means being with Jesus. Praising and loving God with all our being, adoring and obeying Christ, pursuing holiness, cherishing fellowship with other believers, hearing the voice of God through the reading of the Word and prayer – these are just a few things we can do to have a foretaste of heaven on earth. Let’s be honest. Our personal time with God in the Word and prayer is often neglected because we see it as a burden. We’re actually more willing to serve at the church than to spend that quiet, unhurried time with God. Brothers and sisters, why do we desire for heaven yet choose to neglect the very thing that we’ll experience in heaven – this intimate fellowship with God? Pastor Charles Spurgeon said, “If we do not get to heaven before we die, we shall never get there afterwards.” I invite you to find delight in spending time with God.

**Lastly, evangelize.** Paul said to the Christians in Thessalonica, *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?”* (1 Thess. 2:19). How will we feel when we get to meet those who we helped to come to Christ in heaven? Will we regret the pains we experienced, the energy we spent, and the disappointments we felt? Absolutely not. We’ll be thrilled to see them. When we think of heaven, it must fuel our passion for evangelism. What other good news is there than to know that we will spend eternity with God in glory? We must go and share that with others.

## CONCLUSION

Heaven is a place where you’ll experience the fullness of God’s glory and see Him face to face. In His presence, we’ll be made like Him and taste life as it was meant to be. I pray that this truth will radically change the way we live our lives today.

Let’s pray.