

Homesick for Heaven

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Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8, AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION)

Well, where is this home, and what is this home like? We are going to stand on the fringe and peer over the wall into a vast domain; we are going to look out upon the rolling waves of a seemingly endless sea concerning this subject of heaven. We're told here that we are to be "at home with the Lord." This is one of the lovely expressions – and Scripture is filled with these lovely expressions – that speak of the eternal state of the believer, "at home with the Lord."

Now this fifth chapter of 2 Corinthians is one of the highlights of the Word of God. It is of paramount importance to the careful student of the Bible. There are many different subjects presented here which are arresting, intriguing, and impressive.

The interesting thing is that for some of them no conclusion is reached. A problem is stated but not adequately answered – or perhaps not answered to our satisfaction. For instance, the apostle Paul writes, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). Does he mean there is a temporary body given to us when we leave this earth, before we receive our new body? There are many expositors who take that position.

Then we are told about the judgment seat of Christ. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). There has always been a question about how much of our Christian life is going to be exposed at this judgment. I have always felt that it will be put on the screen like a motion picture and that no detail will be left out. But this concept could be entirely wrong.

Then in 2 Corinthians 5:17 we learn that if we are in Christ, we are a new creation: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." How much is involved in that?

Then God opens up the great subject of reconciliation:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19)

I do not think anyone has been able to probe the depths of that great theme.

Finally, we are told that we are ambassadors:

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

What is involved in being an ambassador for Christ? We know some things, but there are other things we apparently do not know.

Heaven – Where is It?

Now for this message we are going to restrict ourselves to one of these suggestive subjects – that is, it will not be adequate nor will it be all-comprehensive, only suggestive.

We are told here, as we are told elsewhere in the Word of God, that there is a heaven out in space. This is a revelation found in the New Testament.

Heaven is not the hope of the Old Testament. As far as I can tell from the Old Testament, God never told anyone that He was going to remove them from this earth to a place out yonder that we call heaven. He did say that our earth would become the Kingdom of Heaven, and I understand this to be the full and adequate meaning of that expression.

“The Kingdom of Heaven” is a progressive term, I grant that, but its final fruition will be the establishment of God’s kingdom on this earth, and that means this earth will become heaven or a portion of God’s heaven. Now that was the hope of the Old Testament, but it’s not the hope of the New Testament.

The first mention of God taking a group of people from this earth out into space is when our Lord introduced the subject in the Upper Room. This One who had been the carpenter of Nazareth down here, said to His own,

... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.
(John 14:2, 3)

And Paul, banking on that statement, wrote that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

Now what about this place? Paul confirmed its existence, but the only description I can find of it is in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation. Therefore, we will have to go there to get the description of this wonderful place where we are to be at home.

We should note that our knowledge of it brings courage and comfort to the heart, and I am sure that one of the reasons so many of God’s people have become discouraged along life’s pathway is because they’ve lost sight of the place where they are going. If you’ve read John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (which, by the way, was Bunyan’s masterful expression of his own experience) you will find that this man Christian, though he went down into the Slough of Despond or went down into Doubting Prison, always could come out and face the future and move upward on the pilgrim pathway because, as he says, “I am on the way to the Celestial City.”

Many of God’s children are so wrapped up in this world today, like a kitty in a ball of yarn, that they have lost sight of the fact that we are pilgrims and strangers down here. They do not realize that to look forward to the Celestial City brings courage and comfort to the heart in our day.

Now we want to turn to chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation. And as we do, we want to see the description that is given here. We find that there are two features we want to develop at this time:

First is the *topography* of heaven. And second is the *typography* of heaven. These are the two themes: the topography of heaven and the typography of heaven.

Now when we speak of the topography of heaven, we mean that it is a place, a material place, if you please. I do not know why the notion has arisen that the difference between that

which is spiritual and that which is carnal is that the carnal is material, something which you can see, and that the spiritual is something you can't see and has no physical qualities whatsoever. That is not true. Actually, some of the most carnal things in this world are things you can't see. Hate and covetousness are works of the flesh, but they are just as much in the unseen realm as love and unselfishness, which are the fruit of the Spirit.

On the other hand, a thing does not have to be out yonder in space with no tangible substance in order to be spiritual, my beloved. Heaven is a good example of this because it is a place with three dimensions: it has height, it has width, it has depth – all of these things. Yet it is in the realm of the spirit.

Notice the description of heaven that is given. And may I say again – I continually repeat it – that the interpretations I am giving you are only suggestions. Yet I trust if you have become discouraged, or perhaps you have not yet begun the pilgrim pathway to this city, that you will be encouraged by what is given here.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1)

This tells us that there will come into existence a new heaven and a new earth. God is trading in this model on a new one, one that will be absolutely, of course, free of sin. And the only change that is called to our attention is the fact that there will be no sea. What a great change that will be!

Now we in Los Angeles are thankful for the ocean. If you do not see why, then take a trip 200 miles to the east or go to Chicago, and you'll see why the ocean is such a valuable asset here on the West Coast.

But can you conceive of this earth without any ocean, that which occupies three-fourths of the globe's surface? If now we had all that space, what a tremendous population could be put here – and will be put here in the eternal ages. Not only that, just think of the parking space we're going to have when we get rid of the ocean! "No more sea" is the one radical change we are told about. Then God moves on and tells about something else that will be new.

Up to this point heaven has been mentioned many times in Scripture, but never described. Our Lord said He was going to prepare a place for us in it; Paul wrote about being homesick for it and wanting to go there; and now it comes into view for the first time. I think it's already in existence, but I don't think we're going to see it until eternity begins; that is, until we have the new heaven and a new earth.

Now will you notice what he says,

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2)

It is a holy city and it's holy because there is no sin there at all. Those who are there are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. They are in Him; they're His bride, and that's the reason it's a holy city. It is the New Jerusalem, because it's in contrast to an earthly Jerusalem.

And then the loveliest thing of all is said concerning it: this city is as a bride adorned for her husband. Now I can't think of any figure of speech that's more adequate than that, "as a bride adorned for her husband."

It has been my privilege in my ministry to have about 200 couples stand before me to be married. And I must confess that I still enjoy standing down in front with the bridegroom. I want to say he is generally not much to look at, but I stand with him and both of us together are probably not much to look at.

But as we stand there, I always look in anticipation – not as he does of course – but I look in anticipation to see the bride. And I want to say as I’ve seen them come down the aisle, and I’m prepared to make this statement and stand by it, I have never yet seen an ugly bride. Every one that I have seen has been beautiful and some of them absolutely ravishing, but they are all beautiful.

Now you say, “The trouble with you, Preacher, is that you’re getting in your dotage and you’re becoming just a little sentimental.” And in case you think I’m becoming sentimental, I want to say that I have seen these girls, many of them, before they got married. In fact, I’ve been at the rehearsal when they had these curlers on. And I want to tell you that beauty was not the way to speak of them. And then I want to say I’ve seen them after they’ve been married. And you can’t always say they’re beautiful. But for some reason, God permits every girl to be beautiful on her wedding day. Yes, He does. I’ve never seen it fail.

Now, my beloved, I think this is the loveliest thing that can be said about the New Jerusalem. This city is a thing of beauty; it is as a bride adorned for her husband. After all, the church is the bride of Christ and is coming with the Bridegroom. This is certainly an adequate picture of it.

Topography

Now I want you to look at the topography of this city, and it’s given to us here. It comes down, we’re told, from God out of heaven. It comes down into space, but we are not told it comes *to* the earth. There are some very fine expositors today who take the position that it comes to this earth. I personally believe that it stays in space. And we’re told,

And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. (Revelation 21:16)

Two facts are evident from this passage: it comes down out of heaven, and it is not stated that it comes to the earth. The passage of Scripture leaves the city hanging in mid air. That is the dilemma many expositors seek to avoid, but why not leave the city in mid air? Is there anything incongruous about a civilization in space?

When I first wrote this theory and it appeared in print, it was really out of keeping with our limited knowledge of space during those years. However, today a rendezvous in space is not something strange at all.

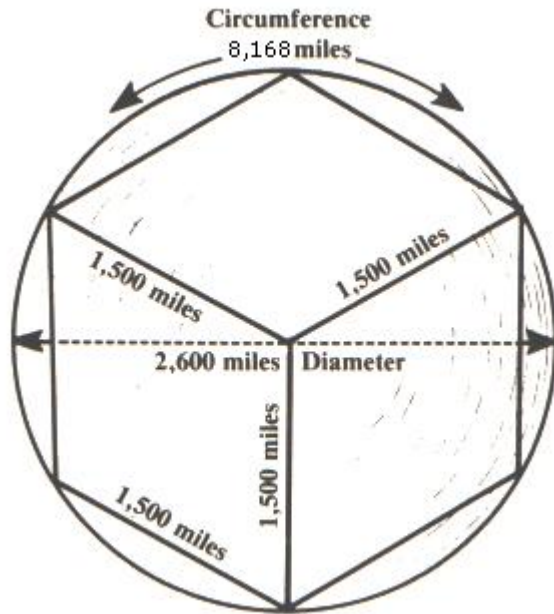
We are told that this city lies foursquare, that it is approximately 1500 miles on each side. There are expositors today who think the city is shaped as a cube. There are others who think of it shaped as a pyramid. Candidly, I would say that either one of these would be rather awkward out in space. I don’t mean to say it would be impossible, but I’ve always felt that there might be some other explanation.

Now what I am going to say is only a theory – please keep that in mind.

The measurements of the city have given rise to all sorts of conceptions as to the size and shape of the city. First of all, notice the size of the city: twelve thousand furlongs are given as the

measurement of each side and of its height. It is 12,000 stadia in the text, which means about 1500 miles.

Now consider with me the shape of the city. “The city lieth foursquare” is the simple declaration of Scripture. That would seem to indicate that the city is a cube with 1500 miles on a side – that is, 1500 miles long, 1500 miles wide, and 1500 miles high. Students of Scripture interpret these measurements in various geometric figures, for example a cube or pyramid, etc. However it is difficult to conceive of either a cube or a pyramid projected out in space. We are accustomed to think of a sphere hanging in space because that is the general shape of heavenly bodies. Yet it is definitely stated that the city is foursquare.



The difficulty resolves when we think of the city as a cube within a crystal-clear sphere. Several times attention is called to the fact that the city is like a crystal-clear stone or crystal-clear gold. This emphasis leads us to believe that the city is seen through the crystal. We live on the outside of the planet called earth, but the bride will dwell within the planet called the New Jerusalem. The glory of light streaming through this crystal-clear prism will break up into a polychromed rainbow of breathtaking beauty. The sphere will have the circumference of 8168 miles. The diameter of the moon is about 2160 miles, and that of the New Jerusalem sphere is about 2600 miles; thus the New Jerusalem will be about the size of the moon. And it will be a sphere, as are the other heavenly bodies.

Some folk are interested in going to the moon. Well, I'm going to wait until this one appears in space because this will be my home someday. And I'm very much interested in it since I intend to spend eternity there.

Now I believe this is the reason we're given a description of the street of gold, and it says it's clear gold. Man has perfected through processes of metallurgy, different colors of gold – yellow, green, white gold; but we have yet to see transparent gold. However, the gold of the New Jerusalem is like clear glass. The city is translucent, but the material is gold in contrast to the crystal-clear stone that surrounds the city. Why should it be clear and what difference does it make about the “asphalt” we'll walk on? It's clear because light is coming from the inside out.

I believe that you and I live in a universe that is actually dark. It has “light holders” in it, but space out there is dark and cold. And one day God will push a button, as it were, and just like

you turn off the lights in your home, God will push a button and every sun will go out of existence. He says here,

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. (Revelation 21:23)

Our Lord will be in this city, and His light will shine through that twelve-stone foundation. What a thing of beauty! Varied hues and tints form a galaxy of rainbow colors. Look at those twelve stones, each one a different color:

1. Jasper (*iaspis*), the diamond, crystal-clear, a reflector of light and color.
2. Sapphire (*sappheiros*), blue, as “the body of heaven in its clearness” (Exodus 24:10).
3. Chalcedony (*chalkēdōn*), blue or gray agate stone (we don’t know the exact color of all of these precious stones).
4. Emerald (*smaragdos*), green.
5. Sardonyx (*sardonux*), red and white stone.
6. Sardius (*sardios*), fiery red.
7. Chrysolite (*chrusolithos*), golden yellow.
8. Beryl (*bērullos*), sea green.
9. Topaz (*topazion*), greenish-yellow.
10. Chrysoprasus (*chrusoprasos*), gold-green.
11. Jacinth (*huakinthoás*), color of a hyacinth.
12. Amethyst (*amethystos*), purple.

The New Jerusalem is a city of light and a city of color. “God is light” and He is there. The light shining from within through the prism of precious stones would give every color and shade of color in the rainbow. Our universe that’s rather drab and cold and dark today will really be flooded with light. It will be the most thrilling sight in the world to see Him turn out all the lights and then this one will go on in the new heaven and the new earth!

The New Jerusalem will be a holy place:

And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Revelation 21:24-27)

The nations of the earth will make a trip up here – they’ll make a trip in space. The New Jerusalem is the holy of holies of the universe just as there was a holy of holies in the temple. The high priest didn’t stay there – he performed his service, then he left.

And the people of the earth will come up here to worship, bringing their glory and honor. They’re not going to stay because it is not their home. This is the home of the church, and this is where all those who are in Christ will be at home with the Lord.

A place like this, may I say, is one of the most thrilling places to look at, but actually, that is not the chief function of the city.

Typography

There is something else. Not only do we try to apprehend the topography of heaven, but notice the typography of heaven. And here our Lord uses terms of accommodation. In other words, it's difficult for you and me to get our thinking adjusted to the way heaven really will be. Therefore, He uses terminology that is typical, and here are examples of it. These things that He mentions are beyond our experience. You will notice several of them? Again, we will not attempt to be exhaustive, but simply make some suggestions to stimulate your thinking.

No Tears

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

Now that is something that you and I have never seen – a world or a city or a community or a home or a person who has never shed a tear.

Ours is a world that's filled with tears. A book on anthropology that was quoted recently in the newspaper has this statement which interests me a great deal. Of course, the author uses the terminology of the anthropologist:

Man is the only animal born into this world that cannot take care of himself. He cannot protect himself, he cannot sustain himself. The only thing he can do when he comes into this world is cry. That's all we do on our own, and that's the first thing we do. We make our entrance into this world crying, and we make it loud and long, for you and I are in a world filled with tears.

Now tears are the badge of heartbreak, home-break, and disappointment. We are in that kind of world today. Won't it be wonderful to be in a city – regardless of its shape – where there will be no more tears? The apostle Paul wrote,

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. (Philippians 1:21, 23)

To be at home with the Lord means no more tears, never again a tear. As a pastor, I've seen too many of them. We never miss a week without seeing tears. I saw them this week again – heartbreak! Oh, my beloved, this world, as an agnostic said, is a veil of tears. From his viewpoint, that's exactly what it is, a veil of tears. And I tell you, unless you are a pilgrim and stranger down here and headed for the Celestial City where our Lord is going to wipe away all tears, you are apt to become very discouraged.

No Death

Now will you notice a second thing which is beyond our experience: "And there shall be no more death." Death is something that is universal in this world today – "in Adam all die." There's not a city today or any community that does not have a cemetery. One of the many, multitudinous problems of Southern California is finding a place to bury people. That's a real

problem today. It will be wonderful to be in a city in which that's no problem at all because there will be no one dying. There will be no more death. Aren't you tired of going to the cemetery? I think every pastor will be glad not to have to make another trip out there. That would be wonderful. The undertaker is going to be out of business, the cemetery will be out of business. And when I mentioned this some time ago, a little boy sitting next to his father in the congregation said, "Dad, not only will the undertaker be out of business, not only will the cemetery be out of business, but you're going to be out of business." His father is an insurance man. He will be out of business also. My beloved, may I say to you, it will be wonderful to be in a place where there is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

All Things New

Now we come to that which to me is the high point of the New Jerusalem where we'll be at home with the Lord.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (Revelation 21:5)

And the Lord Jesus said in effect, "Let Me sign My Name to this because this is so important: Behold, I make all things *new*."

Does that mean anything to you today? Well, it is a great encouragement to me. I'd like to make a confession to you – I make it readily and gladly – I have never attained my goal in life. I have never been the man that I have wanted to be. I have never been the husband I've wanted to be, nor have I been the father I've wanted to be. And may I say that I have never been the preacher I've wanted to be. I have never yet preached the sermon that I'd like to preach. I have found in my life that there have been hindrances, there have been frustrations, there have been disappointments. I've felt many times that things have been unfair and unjust. Have you felt that way? My Lord says, "Behold, I make all things new."

May I be personal? The Lord Jesus will say something like this: "Vernon McGee, you didn't run the race like you wanted to run it. You didn't cross the tapeline as you wanted to cross it. You didn't live as you wanted to live. But we are going to start all over again – behold, I make all things new."

I don't know about you, but I want to do it all over again. Not down here, oh my, no – I don't want to go back over my life. I would never want to do that. But what a glorious prospect to start over again! The apostle Paul wrote, "To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord." The New Jerusalem is the place our Lord Jesus had reference to when He said,

... I go to prepare a place for you. And If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.... (John 14:2, 3)

At Home With the Lord – How?

Let's come back where we began this message, "At home with the Lord." How are we going to get there? If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, and all things have become new.

I'm very frank to tell you that I'm not fit for heaven in this old nature. I don't know why so many of the saints today feel that they're going to adorn heaven when they get there and that they're going to make a tremendous contribution to it. My friend, you and I have no contribution to make to heaven. We have an old nature that is in rebellion against God. We'd like to set up a little kingdom apart from God. We have to be made fit for heaven. And how can we be made fit for heaven?

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things...." What does it mean by old things? A few little habits? No, a new relationship. When we are in Christ, we are no longer joined to the old Adam, but now through faith in Christ we are joined to the resurrected, glorified Savior, clothed in His righteousness and made accepted in the Beloved. All of this because of one thing – our faith in Jesus Christ! We walk by faith and not by sight.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

And as long as I'm down here, He is saying to me, "McGee, you're an ambassador for Christ." And as long as there are ambassadors in this world, it means that the government and the ruler they represent are still at peace with the world. One of these days He's calling His ambassadors home and when He does, the door will be shut and the entrance blocked to this city. But until then "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead [that is, when the Lord Jesus left, He asked us to implore you], be ye reconciled to God."

The Lord Jesus said,

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

He is the way to that city, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." He made a dead-end street out of all of the other so-called ways to God, and He says, "You can be reconciled because I am reconciled to you." When Christ died on the cross. He did all that was necessary to save you. He said, "It is finished." He turned in His report to the Father and said, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (see John 17:4). My friend, you don't have to do anything to add to your salvation. He asks you only to be reconciled to God.

Will you accept it? Will you agree with God that this is the way? Will you start a pilgrim pathway to this Celestial City?