

Heaven

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Revelation 21:1-8.

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. Next week we'll start our summer series on the first 10 Psalms.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] In the year 2000, a Swedish television show was modified for American audience and it took TV by storm. *Survivor* has now filmed 40 seasons. It's typical for contestants who advanced deep into the competition to need months of recovery due to the impacts on their bodies. What would make people volunteer to live with a lack of food, water, and shelter? What would encourage people to endure dealing with backstabbing people? What would help people persevere for weeks of pain when they could be at home on the couch watching the show? They can persevere because they know that that desert island is only temporary and not their real home. They can live through it because if you are the winner, you really only have to endure 39 days of suffering for a reward- \$1 million.

In a sense our lives are like *Survivor*. We have more comforts than them but we live with backstabbing neighbors and co-workers. We live through sickness and pain. We live with emotional troubles and broken relationships. Further, Christians volunteer for an extra dose. We follow a Savior who was hated and crucified. What can help us live and endure suffering and persecution not just for 39 days, but say 85 years? The same as the *Survivor* contestants- temporary pain for a reward. Our reward is an eternal home in Heaven. Knowing that Heaven is our real home should impact how we live now. So that's our application today:

[Proposition] Live knowing Heaven is Home

Christians have always lived with a hope in Heaven. The Christians who received Revelation, which is Christ's letter through the Apostle John, were experiencing intense persecution. They had seen friends walk away and quit the faith. But Jesus wants His people to endure, and He knows we will if we really know that Heaven is our home. But what is Heaven like? Is it sitting on clouds with harps? Is it a

world of sports or chocolate? If we know what it's like, we'll be able to live through this short life knowing our glorious forever home is waiting for us. To do that I want to point out 8 things about Heaven from God's Word. We get to listen to the architect describe it to us. Heaven is our home and God is describing it to us.

[#1] Heaven is new

Let's read v. 1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

This physical sky and earth will pass away and be recreated as a new physical heaven and earth. Our Heaven is really a New and better Earth. Heaven will be new. New mountains and rivers. New trees. New physical bodies. God's not limited by budget or size of the lot. He's not limited by building codes. Quick sidenote for those of you who love the ocean, "sea" in Revelation is the source of chaos, a place for resistance to God, and a place of death. This means that those things will be gone. The oceans themselves may actually continue to exist. And v. 5 says that He will make all things new. Because God is infinite things will never get boring. There will always be new things to discover about Him and our Heavenly home. New jokes to laugh about. New things to look at.

To live like Heaven is our home means that we don't need to get wrapped up in the things of this world that age and wear out. The things we do here matter, but this world will pass away. But Heaven will be new. Live knowing a new Heaven is your home.

[#2] Heaven is holy

Look at v. 2 with me

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

In Revelation cities are used symbolically to represent people. The New Jerusalem is about people. A massive group of people- and they are holy. They are distinct. They are pure. Heaven is holy because God is holy and this city has come from

Him. Heaven is holy because it is a group of people prepared for God. It is a holy place.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us that *without holiness no one will see the Lord*. JC Ryle makes the point that most people don't want to go to Heaven because they wouldn't like it. If you don't want to be holy now, why would you want to be where everyone and everything is holy? To live like Heaven is your home means that we seek to live holy, obedient lives. When we open the Bible and God tells us to repent of lust or greed or self-righteousness or unbelief we do and we must. When God tells us to give or to grow or to wait we do. We are practicing so that we are better able to enjoy our holy Heavenly home.

Heaven is: #1- new. #2- holy. But there's more.

[#3] Heaven is Fellowship

This is the main emphasis of Heaven. The main blessing. Fellowship with God. Look at v. 3 with me.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

God is a person and fellowships with personal beings. Many of can endure things if we have the right person with us. In Heaven we get to be with God without any obstacles due to our sin or the other things that distract us. Heaven is Fellowship- of speaking and listening to God. Of knowing the full acceptance and love He has for us through Jesus. Of the honor of knowing the Greatest Conceivable Being. Of being connected to the source of love and life. Now our fellowship with others is broken by death or distance or available time or mental limitations- none of those things will be obstacles to fellowshiping with God forever. Your Heavenly home is a place of Fellowship.

Do you fellowship with God now? Do you practice listening to Him in His Word and through the world? Do you fellowship with Him in prayer? Do you prioritize your relationship with Him above all others? That's what Heaven is. You can bring a piece of Heaven to earth now through fellowship with God. That's living like Heaven is your home. Heaven is #1- new. #2- holy. #3- fellowship. Let's see another thing-

[#4] Heaven is Joyful

Let's notice one of the main reasons why Heaven is joyful by reading v. 4

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Since God is love and God is the source of life there will be no death in the fullness of His presence. That alone removes the reason for most of our mourning and crying. Since that's the case, that means that all worries and fears will be gone. They are former things that have passed away. We'll have new resurrection bodies and minds so we won't feel the pains we feel now. With all of these things gone, how could Heaven not be joyful?

[Illustration] Could you endure a job in the sewers for a weekend if you knew you were going to receive a billion dollars? In the scheme of eternity, 100 years of this life is actually shorter than one weekend of our lifespans. And our Eternal Heavenly Home Fellowship with an infinite holy and loving God makes a billion dollars look like pennies.

[Application] To live like Heaven is our home means that we know the best days are ahead of us. It means that joy splashes and spills over from Heaven onto us now. It means we can endure if everything is taken away. What if the government takes everything you have? That happened to a number of Christians who were reading this letter. What if you are diagnosed with a slow, painful, terminal illness? What if you are abandoned by your children? What if you are thrown in prison? Even with great pain you can still live like Heaven is your home. You lose your house or bank accounts here- but you have a secure eternal fortune in God's presence that can never be taken away. You are dying now, but that just promotes you to eternal life where there is no death or mourning. You're abandoned now, but you will be next to the One who will never leave you or forsake you forever.

Live like Heaven is your home. Heaven is #1- new. #2- holy. #3- fellowship. #4- joyful.

[#5] Heaven is true

Look with me at v. 5

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Before cameras and film and the ease of travel, people would tell stories of distant lands that may or may not be true. Maybe snow is real, as you explain it to someone who had only lived in the tropics. Maybe the ocean is real, as you explain to someone who has only lived in a desert. Whether we believe them or not depends on whether the person telling us is trustworthy. But here we have God, who cannot lie, telling us about Heaven. It is not make belief. It is real. Heaven is true. They are written down. They are trustworthy and true.

[Illustration] A lady from my childhood neighborhood died this past week at age 57. She was an incredibly healthy lady until she got breast cancer. People that knew her loved her. Now, the question is, does Karen now cease to exist as atheists claim? Or did Karen just become part of the eternal oneness without her distinct personality as eastern religions teach? At the deepest part of our beings we sense that that neither of those options are right. We are more than our physical bodies so something lives on. We are individuals with individual personality and those should be honored, maintained, and even celebrated. But are our feelings like that true?

The God who designed Heaven says, "Yes." Heaven says that your grandparents or friends or heroes who have trusted Christ really are in God's presence now and will be in this future New Heaven and Earth someday soon. It's true. You don't need to take the word of some of these people who spent 23 minutes in Heaven or whatever. You can take God's Word for it. These words are trustworthy and true. Heaven is true. Live like Heaven is true. Live like it's your true and real home.

Heaven is #1- new. #2- holy. #3- fellowship. #4- joyful. #5- true.

[#6] Heaven is for the thirsty

Let's read v. 6

And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment."

God is generous. He loves to show that He is generous. He loves needy people to come to Him saying that they are needy. And He gets glory by showing that He is able to meet even the deepest needs. Do you see the benefit of being thirsty? The thirstier you are, the more you'll seek the water. This is exactly in-line with what Jesus tells the woman at the well in John 4:14

"...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

But do you know who won't get that water? People who aren't thirsty. People who don't need it. You need this water. Do you feel your thirst? Heaven is for the thirsty, not the self-satisfied. That's one problem we have to face. If we aren't thirsty we'll miss out on God's generosity where He gives from a spring of water without payment.

[Illustration] If you were on *Survivor* or lost in the woods you would find yourself thirsty. But the problem in those places is that you might start drinking water you shouldn't. Saltwater from the ocean. Unfiltered or untreated water that might have parasites. Pretty soon the water you drank will actually dry you out. Your body will reject it and start drying out.

[Application] To live like Heaven is your home means to grow in your thirst for Jesus now. To look to satisfy your thirst anywhere other than in Jesus Himself may satisfy you thirst while it's in your mouth, but you will end up dry and dead. Heaven is a place where the thirsty will truly be satisfied because our generous God is there to give you what you truly need.

Live that way today. Live like Heaven is your home. Heaven is #1- new. #2- holy. #3- fellowship. #4- joyful. #5- true. #6- for the thirsty.

Now let's look at

[#7] Heaven is for the Conquerors

Look with me at v. 7

... "The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son..."

The original audience of the book of Revelation were seeing people give up on Jesus and walk away from the faith. Does that sound familiar? The book of Revelation talks about God's people being conquerors. The conquerors are people who persevere in faith. Who allow Jesus to conquer for them. Who get on the tank or the destroyer, but recognize that the real hero is Jesus their general. And notice what being a conqueror means- being a son. Because God is Father He is pleased to have sons and daughters for all those who persevere.

[Application] This is probably the key application for all of us today. Heaven is for those who persevere in faith. This life is temporary. Spend some time talking with those who have lived long lives and they will tell you how quickly it goes. The death rate on earth is 65 million people a year. 178,000 each day. 7425 each hour. 120 each minute. Thousands of people dead since I started preaching. Your time is coming. It will be here soon. Don't be too attached to this life. Live like Heaven is your home. Persevere through your 39 days of *Survivor*. The reward is worth it. Conquer by continuing to believe. Pray, "Jesus I believe, help my unbelief." Trust Christ through breakfast. Then through lunch. Then through dinner. That's how you'll conquer.

Heaven is new. Heaven is holy. Heaven is fellowship. Heaven is joyful. Heaven is true. Heaven is for the thirsty. Heaven is for the conquerors. Now, soberly, let's look at #8.

[#8] Heaven isn't for everybody

When someone we like dies, we act as if they are going to Heaven. But the teachings of Jesus and v. 8 intrude on us. Let's read it

"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Heaven isn't for everybody. Because God is just and holy, those who continue to willfully persist in sin will be left out of a holy heaven. Revelation is full of symbolism, as are many of Jesus' parables that talk about Heaven and Hell. And people use that as an excuse to not believe in them. But here's the issue with symbolism- the symbol is always less than the thing it represents. The symbol warning of sharks beneath the water is not nearly so horrific as a Great White

Shark with 300 teeth charging you at 37 mph. The symbol of a child upside down in a bucket is not nearly so horrific as the lifeless body of a drowned baby. So is there really a lake of fire? Maybe, maybe not. But what we do know is that Heaven isn't for everybody- and those who end up in Hell will have it even worse than these texts make us think.

Who are these people in v. 8? The cowardly and faithless are the anti-conquerors. Those who cave under persecution. But go down the list. I've done detestable things. I've committed murder in my heart. I've committed sexual immorality in my mind. I've probably appealed to some sort of sorcery-like mysticism at times. I've been an idolater by valuing other things above God. I've been a liar. It doesn't matter that I may be slightly better about some of these things than you. It doesn't matter that you may be slightly better about some of these things than me. Or that we're better than that group of people out there. You know the ones. In this fallen world we will momentarily lapse into these sins in the future. God help us. So who can be saved?

Heaven isn't for everybody. How will I know Heaven is my home? I want to live in a new Heavens and New Earth. I want to live in a holy Heaven. I want to live where I will fellowship with an all-satisfying Holy God of love. I want to live where I'll be forever joyful. How do we get off the train we're on that barrels toward Hell and get on the train that goes in the opposite direction. It seems we need to get off at the nearest train station.

The cross of Jesus Christ is the only train station for sinners like you and me. When we are thirsty and come to Christ in faith, He takes all of us. He paid for those sins of ours millennia ago and makes the transaction final when we believe. He defeats sin and its penalty and places us on a train to Heaven with Him. He's the conductor. And when we see that Heaven's our true home we want to get there by any means possible. So when we see these sins and other sins in our lives, we start chucking them overboard so that the train will go faster and smoother. We let Him set the itinerary. Sometimes the tracks will be smooth, straight and flat. Other times it will have ups and downs. But He's taking us home.

If you aren't a Christian, you can be today. But you have to recognize and truly acknowledge that you don't deserve Heaven as your home. In fact, nobody does. But our Generous God says that if you are thirsty and come to Christ as the only

dispenser of water, He'll prepare a place for you. If you are willing to conquer through faith in Christ and follow Him wherever He leads, you will be His son or daughter. It often won't be easy but you won't regret it. These promises will be yours.

[Conclusion] Let's live like Heaven is our home. Let's quit complaining. Let's be more generous and joyful. Let's live for eternal things and loosen our grips on the things that are temporary and growing old. Let's fight sin and be holy people. Let's love God and love our neighbors.

Christian, what physical or material problems in your life won't be solved by being home in a New Heavens and a New Earth? What relational problems won't be solved by being holy and being with holy people? What emptiness or weakness or lack of faith won't be solved by fellowship with God face-to-face. What joy will you have when you are somewhere without death or pain or mourning? Christian, Heaven is real and true. That's our real home. The gameshow *Survivor* isn't real life. It's none of those contestants' homes. In a similar way, this world isn't our home- let's live like Heaven is our home.