Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: The New Heavens and the New Earth

Text: Revelation 21:1-5 -- 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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 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. 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." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Opening: We've heard many stories about what heaven is like. Most of them mention pearly gates and an angel who is standing by to interview those who seek to enter. Perhaps you've heard this one. It's the story of a man named Fred who upon his arrival had just this kind of experience. He was quite timid and wasn't sure what to do, but eventually, he made his way to the entrance to heaven where an angel stood by the gate. The angel explained that before he could be admitted, he must share a purely unselfish, kind deed he performed for someone on earth. Fred thought about it for a minute and then said, "***Oh, yeah. I think I've got one you might be interested in. One day I was walking alone and I came upon a little old lady who was being mercilessly harassed by a huge guy who was standing beside one of those great big motorcycles. He was verbally abusing her and I began to think that he might even do something worse***." "*What did you do?*" asked the Angel. "***Well, I just stepped right up and pushed over the motorcycle just to distract him. Then I kicked him real hard in the shins and told the old lady to run for help***." "*Amazing!*" said the Angel. "***That's not all,"*** continued Fred, ***"While he was grabbing his shin, I hauled off and gave the guy a great shot right to the gut with my fist***." The angel looked at the man, took into account his slight build and timid nature, and began to question the authenticity of his story. "*And just when did you perform this heroic deed?*" Fred took one look at his watch and replied, "***Oh, about two and a half minutes ago***." WELL, I'M PRETTY CERTAIN THIS IS NOT AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HEAVEN WILL BE LIKE. I'M EQUALLY CERTAIN THAT CHRISTIANS WANT TO KNOW HOW IT'S DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE. SO, THIS MORNING, IN OUR FINAL MESSAGE IN THE SERIES ***THINGS TO COME,*** WE'RE GOING TO DISCOVER WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS ABOUT THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH.

OUR HOME IN HEAVEN (**Revelation 21:1-2 -- 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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband**). Just as our resurrected bodies are created to resemble our earthly bodies, so the New Heaven and New Earth will be created to resemble the present ones. But this will not be just a renovation of our current heaven and earth since they have been destroyed by fire (**2 Peter 3:7 -- But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored**

up for fire), but the creation of entirely new ones. The New Earth will be the dwelling place of God's people. The centerpiece of God's new creation will be a holy city called the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven. The Bible tells us something of its size and construction as well as what life will be like for us as we dwell there for eternity.

- **The DIMENSIONS of the New Jerusalem**. It will be 1500 miles high, wide, and long (**Revelation 21:16 -- The city lies foursquare; its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal**). Some people believe that this might be symbolic language just to help us appreciate the amount of room that God has prepared for those who will be in heaven. This is possible, yet it seems to me that if the Apostle John, in relaying a vision given to him by an angel during a tour of heaven (**See Revelation 21:9-10**), was trying to make that point, he could just say, "***It's really big***!" It makes little sense that he would provide exact dimensions unless they are accurate. So, let's assume that this is the size of the New Jerusalem. This means that the foundation is roughly 763 trillion square feet, or about the size of 1/2 of the United States. Unless it's just one big cathedral ceiling, we should assume there are levels or floors in this city. This is a total guess, but if each one is a mile high, that would mean that there are 1,500 levels. Now multiply this number times 763 trillion and you get an estimate of the amount of room available. I'm very confident it there will be more than enough space for every follower of Christ who has existed and will exist throughout human history.
- **The CONSTRUCTION of the New Jerusalem**. In the book by John Bunyan, ***Pilgrim's Progress***, *Christian* and *Hopeful* finally see the city of God. They are completely overwhelmed. All they can say is, "***If you see my beloved, tell Him I am sick with love***." It was so beautiful, this dwelling place of God, that they could not look directly at it. What did they see?
  - They saw a city ***illumined by the glory of God*** (**Verses 11, 23 – (He showed me a city …) having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal; And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb).** There will be no need for the moon or sun to light the way because the Bible tells us that God will be the source of its light (**See 1 John 1:5 – God is light; John 8:12 –** (Jesus) **I am the light of the world**).
  - They saw a city ***surrounded by a great high wall with twelve massive gates, three facing each direction***. (**Revelation 21:12-14 -- It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb).** These are positioned to limit access to only those who enter ***the right way*** (**John 10:9 -- I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved**). In addition, they will serve to remind us that the Gospel is for all men.
  - They saw a city ***that was prepared for believers who have lived throughout history***. The gates were named for the 12 sons of Israel, while the foundation stones were named for the 12 apostles (**See Verses 12-14**).

- They saw a city ***adorned with precious stones and with streets of gold*** (**Revelation 21:18-21 -- The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass**).
- They saw a city ***that unlike the old Jerusalem had no temple, because the Father and the Son are the temple*** (**Revelation 21:22 -- And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb**).
- They saw a city ***that never shut its gates because there was no fear of an invading enemy*** (**Revelation 21:25 -- its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there**).
- They saw a city ***that could never be corrupted by sin*** (**Revelation 21:27 -- But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life**).
- They saw a city ***that had a river running down through the middle of it called the River of the Water of Life and on both sides the Tree of Life***. There will be no more death in heaven. The curse will itself be cursed (**Revelation 22:1-3 -- Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him**). When Adam and Eve sinned, God cast them from the Garden of Eden lest they would eat from the Tree of Life and live forever with the effects of sin. In heaven, they will eat freely of the Tree of Life as death, itself, is abolished. Are you looking forward to being in the New Jerusalem? ***May your first glimpse and every one thereafter cause you to cry out, "I am sick with love.***" (Review: Our Home in Heaven)

OUR RELATIONSHIPS IN HEAVEN.

- **Our relationship with God.** The Psalmist says that to desire heaven is to desire God (**See Psalm 73:25**). What will make it so special for us is the opportunity to dwell in His very presence (**Revelation 21:3 -- 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.**) This means that **we will see God face to face** (**Revelation 22:4 -- they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads**). Once sin was introduced into the world, mankind was no longer able to look at the face of God BECAUSE ONLY THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD--**Matthew 5:8**). You may remember that when Moses asked to see the glory of Yahweh, he was only permitted to look at the

back of God as He passed by (**See Exodus 33:18-23**). The Apostle Paul reminds us that God lives in **unapproachable** light (**See 1 Timothy 6:15b-16a**). While in this body, we are not able to gaze upon His beauty lest we die. But in heaven we will look upon Him and when we do, we will proclaim that we have never seen anyone or anything that was so absolutely breathtaking.

- **Our relationship with other believers.** Some people argue that Christians will not require relationships with other human beings in heaven. Their logic goes something like this: If God is all we need, then He will be all we have (**See Psalm 73:25**). But this view doesn't seem to fit with the teaching of the Bible. If you remember, God created us in the garden with the need for human companionship. Note that this was true even before the introduction of sin into our world (**See Genesis 3:1ff**). The introduction of meaningful human companionship turned God's assessment of "**not good"** (**See Genesis 2:18**) into a declaration of "**very good"** (**See Genesis 1:31**). It makes no sense to argue that this companionship will be discontinued in heaven. As **Randy Alcorn** says in his book, ***Heaven***, "To take pleasure in another image-bearer (**See Genesis 1:28**) does not offend God, but pleases Him! WHAT CAN WE SAFELY SAY ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER IN HEAVEN?
  - ✓ **We will recognize each other and share memories of our lives together**. We know that Christ's disciples recognized Him as He walked around in His glorified body (**See John 21:7**). **Moses and Elijah** were recognizable during the transfiguration of Christ (**See Luke 9:29-33**). In addition, Scripture NEVER SAYS that God will wipe away our memories (ONLY OUR TEARS), so it seems that will keep them. As a matter of fact, we are told that we shall be like our Lord Jesus (**See 1 John 3:2**). Surely this doesn't mean in holiness only, but in everything! If after His resurrection Jesus knew His disciples and remembered His life on earth, why shouldn't we?
  - ✓ **We will pursue and develop new relationships** (**Mark 3:32-35 -- And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." 33 And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother"**). It seems impossible to me that we, as a part of the family of Christ, will not have the opportunity to get to know our brothers and sisters better. After all, to be a part of a family is to assume relationships with one another. It seems far more likely that we will be able to meet new people and develop new friendships. Won't it be something to be able to spend time with Abraham or Moses or Elijah or Peter?
  - ✓ **We will be as close to each other as we are now to our spouses**. The one-flesh relationship we currently enjoy in marriage is a **signpost pointing to our relationship with Christ**, who is our bridegroom. Once we reach our final destination, the signpost will no longer be necessary. ***The purpose of marriage is not to replace heaven, but to prepare us for it*** (**See Ephesians 5:31-32**). Does this mean that we will not be as close to our husbands or wives as we have been in this world? Not at all! ***We will be closer knowing that God chose us for each other so that we might sample what life will be like with Him forever***. (Review: Our home and relationships in heaven.)

OUR ACTIVITIES IN HEAVEN. There are many people on earth who think that heaven will be a place of boredom. I suspect this is for three reasons: (1) First, the Bible doesn't give us a tremendous amount of information about what we're going to be doing in heaven. Consequently, we are left to conjecture and lack the capacity to imagine an existence in the presence of God's glory and devoid of corruption. **(2)** There are others who mistakenly think that the only way to have fun is to sin! Since there will be no sin in heaven, they wonder where the fun will be. You've seen the bumper stickers. "***Go to Heaven for the climate and Hell for the company***." "***If there is no beer in heaven, I'm not going***." Unfortunately, these people do not understand that sin, while offering a short season of self-centered pleasure, is not the place to find eternal pleasures. They come from the Lord Himself (**See Psalm 16:11**). **(3)** Perhaps another reason that people believe heaven will be boring is because their Christian lives are boring. If this is the case with you, it is not God's fault! He calls us to follow Him in an adventure that puts us on life's exhilarating edge, so that we can say with the Psalmist, "**Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere"** (**Psalm 84:10**). That is not the comment of someone who is bored with a life lived in the presence of God! Heaven will certainly exceed our greatest dreams and expectations. I like to think that your best moment in heaven will always be your next. So. what will we do, when we get there? Let's look at what the scriptures teach us.

- **In heaven we will rest (Hebrews 4:8-10 -- For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his). N**ow some of you are thinking, ***"I knew it! Heaven is going to be boring. I don't want to rest. I want to do something exciting***." To understand what the word "**rest**" means in this context, it would be helpful to first talk about what it doesn't mean. (**1**) **It does not mean to cease from any work**. There is a word for that and it is not used here (For an example see **Matthew 11:29** where the Lord uses the word with respect to rest from the impossible burdens handed down by the Pharisees); (**2**) **It also does not mean "to sleep**." Again, there is another word that has this meaning (**See John 11:13**); (**3**) The term means rest from a specific task or purpose. When God entered His Sabbath rest (**See Genesis 2:2**), He did not stop working altogether (**Philippians 2:13 – For it is God who is at work in you to will and to work for His good pleasure**), but He did cease from the specific work of creation. Jesus told His disciples that they would be working in His absence (**John 14:12 – the works that I do shall you do and greater works**). What kind of works was He talking about? The disciples performed works that revealed the true identity of the Son...in other words, their deeds testified to the life-transforming power of the Gospel itself. ***This is the work that we will rest from when we enter heaven***. THERE WILL BE NO NEED FOR EVANGELISM IN HEAVEN! That task which is, for many of us, the most difficult work of a disciple of Christ on earth will no longer be necessary. Why? Only believers will be in heaven. IF GOD HAS GIVEN YOU A BURDEN FOR SOMEONE, NOW IS THE TIME TO SHARE THE GOSPEL. From time to time, we hear statistics about how people first came into church membership. These figures trace back to **the Institute for American Church Growth**, which asked 10,000 people about their pilgrimage. What led them in? Answers were: Special need, 2 percent; Walk-in, 3 percent;

Pastor, 6 percent; Visitation, 1 percent; Sunday school, 5 percent; Evangelistic crusade, 5 percent; Program, 3 percent; Friend/relative, 79 percent. The work that you are free to do now will not be necessary in heaven because there will be no one left to evangelize.

- **In heaven we will worship**. It is impossible to stand in the very presence of God without feeling compelled to worship His majesty. There are many examples in the Bible of people whose only response, having caught but a glimpse of God's glory, was to exclaim His greatness. How could we possibly think that we will do anything less in heaven when God dwells in our midst?
- **In heaven we will serve** (**Revelation 22:3 -- There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him**). The word for "serve" is used most often in relation to service that is directed toward God (**See Matthew 4:10**). So, it seems that we will serve God by doing His work, utilizing the gifts and talents we were given and which we have honed (**See 2 Timothy 1:6**) as we minister to others throughout our lives.

Conclusion: Several years ago, on "**Good Morning, America**," **Joan Lunden** featured some extraordinary gifts you might want to include on your Christmas gift list.

- ❖ One of them was a Jaguar automobile, the Jaguar 220. If you care to order one of these, go to your Jaguar dealer and put down your $80,000 deposit. Then when the automobile is delivered, you are expected to pay the balance of $507,000. The Jaguar 220 is a $587,000 automobile, and they only make 250 of them a year.
- ❖ Joan Lunden mentioned that if you were to purchase such an automobile, you might also be interested in a new car wax that promises to give it the ultimate shine. It retails for $3,400 for an 8-ounce can. I guess if you can afford a $587,000 automobile, why not spend $3,400 for car wax?
- ❖ A third item she mentioned was a $300,000 gold and silver toilet seat inlaid with precious stones.
- ❖ Of course, there were cheaper gifts for those who have everything: an $18,000 frisbee, a $10,000 yoyo, a $12,000 mousetrap, and even a $27,000 pair of sunglasses.
- ❖ And for the proud grandparent who is wondering what to buy the new grandbaby, how about a $28,000 pacifier?

Such gifts stagger our imagination, don't they? They are not, however, indescribable. Yet heaven is, at least according to the Apostle Paul: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (**See 1 Corinthians 2:9**). When it comes to our eternal home, there is much we don't know. Still, we know enough because God has graciously given us a glimpse so that we long to be with Him forever.