

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: In his wonderful book, *Things Unseen*, **Mark Buchanan** writes, “I know a woman whose husband terribly betrayed her. He engaged in multiple affairs and ruinous gambling escapades that plundered and squandered all their savings. Then he left her destitute with her young children to raise, no support forthcoming. She took a cleaning job to feed herself and her children. One day, scouring a floor, she hit bottom. She was utterly alone, desperately weary.
- “Kneeling on wet tiles, her entire body suddenly, unexpectedly filled with light and strength. ‘I started to sing,’ she says. ‘I couldn’t help myself. I suddenly knew, with complete certainty, that no matter what happened in my life, everything would be all right.’” [p.57]
- B. Our Christian conviction that “everything will be alright” stands on the foundation of our hope of heaven. Everything will *not* be alright here. By the grace of God, some things do get better, but the *promise* is that God will one day make everything new, and we will dwell with him forever. Then, and only then, but *certainly* then, will *everything be all right*.
- C. Turn to **Rev. 21:1-4**. What we see here is the grand climax of all history. In the chapters before this Jesus returns for his church and then, with them, reigns over this old earth for a thousand years, imprisoning Satang and bringing everything under his control. At the end Satan will be released and there will be one last great rebellion on earth which will end in the final judgment of those whose names are not written in the Book of Life, and of Satan and demons—all cast into the lake of fire. Right now, Christians who have died are with Christ in paradise, but they are not in *this* heaven exactly. They are safe and happy but waiting, just as we do, for the end of the beginning and the beginning of forever. All Scripture points to this. **This is the moment we’ve all been waiting for!**

Now, let's see if we can't stir up some homesickness: v.1...

**I. IN THE END, WE WILL FINALLY ENJOY HEAVEN ON EARTH (21:1)**

- A. **V.1** – “A new heaven and a new earth.” Genesis tells us that *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* And had there been no sin that world—*this* world—it would have been the everlasting dwelling of God with his people. What this verse is promising is that our ultimate home will be God's re-creation of the heavens and earth. Heaven will not be completely other-worldly—some sci-fi weird unimaginable universe. The first world God made was exquisite; his masterpiece. He will not throw it all away like a bad idea. It is not ‘back to the drawing board’ for God. Rather, we will live on a re-made planet, not so different really from this earth except that everything will be cleansed and redeemed.

Illus.: In **Marilynne Robinson's** Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Gilead*, one elderly pastor is telling about his friend, another older pastor: *“Boughton says he has more ideas about heaven every day. He said, ‘Mainly I just think about the splendors of the world and multiply by two. I'd multiply by ten or twelve if I had the energy. But two is much more than sufficient for my purposes.’ So he's sitting there multiplying the feel of the wind by two, multiplying the smell of the grass by two.”* That's the right idea.

Illus.: **Jack Hayford**, the beloved pastor from Los Angeles, tells this story: *“It was a deeply sobering day when I came to Carl's room in the hospital knowing there were only a matter of hours to live. And as we sat beside the bedside, I said, ‘Carl, how are you feeling?’ A man of deep faith and commitment to Jesus Christ and a very experienced and highly respected lighting director at CBS, he looked at me, his eyes misted slightly, he said, ‘Pastor Jack, you know when you're in my business, it's the combination of lights, the skill at blending things together in order to create special effects, that's what this job is about.’ He said, ‘This morning I woke up and in the quiet of my heart, Jesus spoke to me and he said, ‘Carl, how would you like to direct a sunset?’”* [Gaither, *Heaven*, trk 14]

B. **V.1b** - “And there was no longer any sea.” In the Bible, the sea is not perceived as a vacation spot. It is often a foreboding symbol. The seas and oceans of this world, for all their beauty and majesty, are frightening. The swallow up people. They separate people. We never worry about the land overtaking the sea, but we all know how the mighty oceans can threaten land and homes. Remember, John is writing this letter while exiled on Patmos, a tiny, rocky, arid island in the Aegean Sea. The sea imprisoned him. The sea is a potent symbol in the Bible of separation, turmoil and death. In Revelation the diabolical Beast rises from the sea. In the new world there will be no more raging, stormy oceans either around us or within us; no more life-swallowing seas or watery gulfs separating God’s people from one another.

**SUMMARY:** C. S. Lewis captured the idea of the new heaven and new earth better than anyone I’ve ever read. In the last of his Narnia Chronicles, *The Last Battle*, he portrays the girl Lucy as she mourns the loss of Narnia, a great world created by Aslan, a beloved world that she assumed had been forever destroyed. Jewel the unicorn mourns too, calling his beloved Narnia, *“The only world I’ve ever known.”*

Although Lucy and her family and friends are on the threshold of Aslan’s country (as we are of heaven), she still looks back at Narnia and feels a profound loss. But as she gets deeper into Aslan’s country, she notices something totally unexpected.

“Those hills,” said Lucy, “the nice woody ones and the blue ones behind—aren’t they very like the southern border of Narnia.”

“Like!” cried Edmund after a moment’s silence. “Why they’re exactly like. Look, there’s Mount Pire with his forked head, and there’s the pass into Archenland and everything!”

“And yet they’re not like,” said Lucy. “They’re different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they’re more...more...oh, I don’t know...”

“More like the real thing,” said the Lord Digory softly. ...

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed and then cried: "This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that is sometimes looked a little like this." [Alcorn, *Heaven*, p. 238-239]

V.2 tells us heaven is a city... We tend to think of a city as its buildings and streets, but ultimately, any city is its people. I suspect the mayor has said, "*Chicago is its people!*"

## II. IN THE END, GOD'S BELOVED PEOPLE WILL BE A BEAUTIFUL CITY IN A PERMANENT HOME (21:2)

- A. Right now God is gathering up his people in paradise. But one day, "*when the last soul's been converted, (fare thee well, fare thee well),*" when Satan has been subdued and sin put away forever, then God's people will descend with Jesus to take up our eternal residence in this new heaven and new earth. We *rise* to meet the Lord in the air when he comes for us but when it is time to go home, we *descend* to the new creation. "*The Holy City coming down out of heaven from God.*" You might imagine this like one of those home improvement shows on TV where the couple gets the big Reveal, see their wondrous new home, and run in to begin their lives there. But this isn't a big, beautiful empty city coming down for us to run in and find our perfect condos. Instead, it is almost as if the *earth* has been waiting for us, as if creation as been groaning in anticipation. The whole creation has been rehabbed and then looks up and sees its redeemed family, along with their King and Bridegroom, coming to fill their new world with the people of life.
- B. Right now, believers who have died gather in heaven, like family gathering the night before a wedding! Communion is like a tasting—a foretasting—of the wedding feast we will enjoy tomorrow. What John saw was the processional! "*...the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*" We Christians are the Bride of Christ; thus it is

the beloved church of Jesus that descends to our permanent home in the new heaven and new earth. And how beautiful we will be! There's an old gospel song that says, "*How beautiful heaven must be.*" **Heaven will be beautiful, in part, because we will be beautiful.** A bride "*without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*" [Eph 5:27] All our sins will be gone, not only forgiven but emptied out of us; detoxed and made clean. All the lines of worry and sorrow; the stooped shoulders, sad eyes and grief-gray hair—all gone. All the stains and strains upon our souls—gone. There ought to be music behind this verse: [*"The Bridal March"*]. A people dressed in white linen washed in the blood of the Lamb, and woven from righteous deeds of the saints themselves, descending like a Bride down the aisle of the sky, to take our place in our vast new home.

- C. Yet this New Jerusalem is not only a people, it is also a place. Jesus said, "*I go to prepare a **place** for you.*" Sin has so discolored and distorted our concept of a city that the prospect of living forever in a city may not be all that appealing. The New Jerusalem is a real city with bejeweled walls and gates and streets, with trees and a river. I do not know what kinds of dwellings or buildings there will be—if any—but I know they will not be isolating like our high-rises or suburbs. They will not be built of anything so temporal as mere granite or steel. They will not be safety precautions—doors and locks and Stop signs, nor will there be bad neighborhoods or dark alleys. There will not be shopping there—no idol-packed temples to possessions, but there will be everything to make people better, richer, more beautiful, more interesting.

**Vv.23-26** tell us that it will be bright with the glory of God so that there will be no more night. That the nations will bring their splendor into it. Have you ever been to Epcot Center's World Showcase, where they try to give you a little taste of countries like Morocco and Norway, China and Mexico, all on one street. It's a pretty faint reflection of those cultures, but in heaven it will work

wonderfully—all “the glory and honor of the nations”, redeemed from all that spoils them now, shaping the union of God’s people.

**Ch 22** tells us that heaven will be like a new Garden of Eden—“*with the river of the water of life... flowing down the middle of the great street of the city,*” bordered by trees of life, where the fruit tastes of life itself.

- D. **V.2** says that the New Jerusalem will be a *holy* city where every relationship is good and loving, every sight is beautiful, and every corner is safe. Not crowded, but intimate; not noisy, but ringing with praise; not partitioned by walls, hedges and fences but bound and linked by love for one another; not populated by the selfish and sullen and strange but by brothers and sisters washed clean of every offending sin, every off-putting weakness, every defensive memory. A city decked out like a bride.

E.

**V.3...**

### **III. IN THE END, GOD WILL FINALLY AND FOREVER LIVE WITH HIS PEOPLE (21:3-4)**

Do you remember how Genesis tells how the LORD God would walk in the Garden of Eden communing with Adam and Eve? Sinned stopped that, but ever since then God has been yearning to resume his walks among his people.

- A. The word, ‘dwelling,’ (“Now the dwelling of God is with men”) has lines drawn back to verses all over the Bible. It literally means ‘tent’, pointing back to the OT tabernacle where Israel met and worshipped the LORD. **John 1:14** says about Jesus: “*The Word became flesh and lived* [same word] *for awhile among us.*” The NT teaches that right now God dwells in us, each and all, by his Spirit. But this is the moment we’ve all been waiting for—when God dwells among us in the fullest and richest sense of the word.
- B. Do you recognize that phrase, “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” That is God’s great covenant—his great promise to his people. It is the Bible’s great dream and promise. I counted at least 17 times in the Bible where that statement is made, beginning

with God’s covenant with Abraham in Gen. 17. It is a promise held out again and again to God’s people when they were wandering far from the Father, when their hearts were breaking, when hope seemed gone. And it is a **promise that very nearly aches with yearning of God himself**. No one has ever looked forward to this day more than God himself, whose love has spared no expense to make it true.

- C. To have God living with us means sorrow will over forever: v.4... Oh, what a sweet verse this is! How precious! **Ps. 56:8** says that God has kept a record of our tears. **Mark Buchanan** observes, “*Our sorrow has as much to do with remembered suffering as it does with present suffering. Indeed, most human suffering is cumulative, a lifetime’s worth of losses and misses, heartaches and hardships, cruel words uttered and tender words withheld, all piled up and rotting.*” [p.86] God, of course, wipes all those piled up, rotting sorrows away, along with the tears.
- D. We live now in what will be called then ‘the old order’. It is this world system where sin gets away with murder. But Jesus has dealt with sin by dying for sinners on the cross. And with sin forgiven, death has lost its sting and the grave has relinquished its long winning streak. With death defeated, all the tear-causing symptoms of sin will also be banished—mourning, crying and pain. They are gone, because in heaven they won’t have a leg to stand on. “*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.*”

### **Conclusion**

Like the woman weeping on the wet tiles realized, “*no matter what happens in this life, everything will be all right,*” not now, maybe, but certainly—when this old order of things passes away.

**Bishop Ryle**, over 100 years ago, said, “*I pity the man who never thinks of heaven.*” **Our goal in thinking of heaven is not to escape, but to be realists.** To lay hold, as the most sensible of all

things, of hope and endurance. To be thirsty for Christ and overcome all that bars our way here.

Heaven, for the believer, is in our blood. When we're born again, we're born homesick. **Augustine** wrote, "*I am groaning with inexpressible groaning on my wanderer's path, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart lifted up towards it—Jerusalem my homeland, Jerusalem my mother.*"

**C. S. Lewis** said, "*If I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.*"

[all in Alcorn, *Heaven*, p.160]