

## What Will Heaven Be Like?

In the name of Jesus, who lights up our life on earth and in heaven, dear citizens of New Jerusalem:

Family relationships are priceless. Norman Schmeckpeper especially appreciated God's gift of his family as an only child, raised by his grandfather. It's sweet to hear how the dear old man told young Norman after meeting Elenora, "She's the one for you." Nearly seventy years of marriage surely show the wisdom of Great Great Grandpa Schmeckpeper's words. After many hours with the family at Norman's bedside, I can say you live up to your German name: *Schmeckpeper – great tasting peppers*.

What I enjoyed most about our time together was the frequent question: **What Will Heaven Be Like?** God has gifted your family with a great taste for heaven. You savor hope in Jesus our crucified, risen and now eternally living Savior who has promised, "*Because I live, you also will live.*" (John 14:19) We quickly read Revelation 21 and 22 for a devotion. Several family members asked me to repeat this. We'll record it today so you can go back and listen on our website. No way can we exhaust the wonder of these last two chapters of the Bible; all eternity will be needed to explore heaven. But here Jesus gives us a taste in a Sunday afternoon vision of visions to His Apostle John in exile on Patmos Island.

**21:1-2 What Will Heaven Be Like?** As the hymn writer put it: *Love's purest joys restored*. The seven seas affect our weather now, but there is no sea in heaven. It will be one bright, beautiful wedding day when the Lover of our souls finally has His bridegroom home at last. She is dressed in a wedding gown of His righteousness. And we, His Church, are as eager as Jesus to be together with Him.

**21:3-4 What Will Heaven Be Like?** God pictured this for His people Israel in the Promised Land. Every year God's Law required a national camping trip call the Festival of Tabernacles. Vacation was mandatory. No one was allowed to work. You and your family had to enjoy camping with God who gave another abundant harvest. Literally, it says that in heaven God will *tent* with His people. He *tented* in Person when the Word of God took on human flesh and blood through the womb of the virgin Mary. But in heaven we will be on vacation with God forever. No more tears – all wiped away by Jesus' gentle hand. Gone forever will be death, mourning, crying and pain. No room for anything by joy with Jesus.

**21:5** Jesus steadfastly rules on heaven's high throne. God does not lie. You can trust this for sure.

**21:6-8** Our Savior identifies Himself as eternal. Here we see His compassion by faith in His Word; there in heaven we will taste it like thirsty climbers at a crystal clear mountain spring sweet forever. Overcoming now is the rule. But there our victory will look all the more intense. Totally unearned, our inheritance of heaven will deliver the full rights of sons to all the boys and girls who trusted in Jesus as their Savior from sin. All who rejected Him in unbelief and showed their unbelief by lives of sin will be cast out from God's presence forever. What they wanted they will get from God.

**21:9-14** Throughout the Bible the number *seven* is used for *judgment*. *Seven* angels with *seven* plagues deliver God's condemnation on all who oppose Him. But God's *perfect seven judgment* ruled in our favor when Jesus rose from the dead. With John we get to see Christ's Bride, the Church, pictured as a city. On earth Jerusalem has been called "the city of bloodshed." In heaven the New Jerusalem is holy, set apart for God and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. She's so beautiful no earthly gems can shine so brightly with God's glory. City gates were the most vulnerable places in the wall, but New Jerusalem has *three* gates in *four* directions = *twelve*. In the desert *twelve* tribes camped all around the tabernacle of God's presence. In heaven we will have direct communion with God by the true Israel – Jews and Gentiles who put their trust in God's Messiah whom He sent through His dear Jewish nation.

21:15-21 This beautiful Bride-City's measurements are all in *twelve's* – the number of God's Church in the Old and New Testaments. We all are saved by the same faith in the same Savior Jesus Christ. Take *twelve* times *ten*, the number for completion, *three* times in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and you have 12,000 stadia in a perfect cube. No city on earth is over a thousand miles wide and long and high. The walls are  $12 \times 12 = 144$  cubits thick, over 200' by our measurement. The numbers are more important than the geography. And so are the materials which cost you big bucks on earth, but which heaven has as pavement and cement, so great are her riches. In fact, each of the *twelve* gates is a single pearl. Pure gold like transparent glass paves Main Street in God's city.

21:22-27 Here on earth we love to be with Jesus as He reveals Himself in His Word and sacraments. But in heaven what we could only enjoy by faith from a distance here, will reach complete fulfillment there. Jesus will be closer than the warm rays of the sun and the bright revelation of the moon. All earth's ethnic groups who heard the Good News of Jesus' forgiveness will walk about in total freedom in a land with no more shadows. England's Queen Elizabeth said she hoped someday to lay her crown at the feet of Jesus. So it will be for all rulers and monarchs who trusted in Christ's righteousness and despaired of their own. Our greatest glory on earth is a dim reflection of the blazing brilliance of heaven. Your name written in God's good book by faith at your Baptism means you get to go. With all the security of those *twelve* gates guarded by *twelve* of God's invincible holy angels, the gates of heaven will never be shut – absolute security, but no enemies to threaten and no night to cover their violence.

**22:1-5** In another apocalyptic book of the Bible, the Holy Spirit showed Ezekiel the prophet the river of life flowing from the throne of God in Jerusalem. The farther it flowed the deeper it got until Ezekiel says it was ***“a river that no one could cross.”*** (47:5) In the Garden of Eden our first parents disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden tree. Suffering and death invaded God's perfect creation. Adam and Even were shut out of Paradise and prevented from eating of the tree of life. Otherwise, they would have been stuck in death, separated by sin forever from God. In heaven the clear crystal river of the water of life flows down the middle of New Jerusalem's Main Street. And the tree of life is growing on both sides for everyone to enjoy its constant *twelve* crops of fruit. Full and complete healing will be enjoyed by all because the Name of Jesus conquers all and His Name will be written on our foreheads. We belong to Him body and soul, freed from the curse of sin and death, no more frustrated on earth by the shadows of night. No need for the sun when Jesus is shining in all His glory and our new eyes can look with joy.

22:6 Sinful hearts may doubt this, but Jesus' holy angel says again it's all true revelation from God.

22:7 Now we hear the comforting voice of sweet Jesus Himself: ***“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”*** You'll always know that God is on your side, you will never be alone, as long as you guard and treasure this proclamation of what heaven is like.

22:8-9 Oops! John did it again. Jesus and His holy angels are so very, very patient with us! This is the second time an angel said, ***“Do not do it!”*** (19:10; 22:9) when John tried to worship him. Angels are our fellow servants. They say, ***“Worship God!”***

22:10-11 This Book of Revelation is meant for everyone. Stop the texting. Get off the phone. Shut down your computer unless you're on a Bible website. This Book can keep you from sin, so don't let anything keep you from the Book! Don't be sealed in vile unbelief forever when the last trumpet sounds.

22:12-21 Jesus calls you to come and quench your thirsty soul in His Good News of all-forgiving grace. He promises again to bring rewards of grace. He died for us, then gave us faith to believe it, then rewards us like a grandfather rewards his faithful grandson. Sorrow and loneliness that come and go down here are gone forever in heaven. Jesus says, ***“Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.***