

"THE HOLY CITY: HOME OF THE SAINTS"

(Revelation 21:1-6a)

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[McKendree U.M.C.; 11-4-18]

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1. Read Text (at all services): Revelation 21:1-6a and Pray.
2. [Story of Man Who Could Have Been There Sooner]

A man once died and went to Heaven. When he got there he just couldn't believe how great it was: he saw streets of gold everywhere; music -- the most beautiful music he'd ever heard -- coming from all over; and he saw lovely green pastures, gentle rolling waters, and high, snow-capped mountains as a part of the heavenly landscape.

And so, when he reached the great heavenly throne to be introduced to the great ruler of this land, he said to God, *"This place is tremendous! The music, the beauty... It's 100... No... 1000 times better than I expected! In fact, if I'd known heaven was this good, I'd have come here sooner!"*

And hearing this, God replied, *"Well, you could have been here sooner, if you hadn't eaten all that oat bran!"*
3. Well, today -- on what's called "*All-Saints Sunday*" -- I want us to talk about the wonder and beauty of that place that we Christians often call the "home of the saints."

A--And for professional football fans... No, we're not talking about New Orleans, but about the final destination of *anyone* who professes Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (i.e., God's "*saints*" ¹).

B--Verse 2 of today's Scripture calls that final destination "*the Holy City, the New Jerusalem*".

C--More often we call it "**HEAVEN**," but by whatever name, it's a place that has intrigued and fascinated humanity for ages.

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4. Throughout history, we humans have often speculated over a detailed description of what heaven will be like.

A--But we just don't find this in the Bible -- at least not to the degree that we might want.

B--And why is this? Well, Christian author Vance Havner suggests that the reason the Bible doesn't give us more information about heaven is that it would be too distracting.

1--He says it's like the boy who sat down to eat a bowl of spinach and broccoli at one end of a table when there was large chocolate cake at the other end -- he had a hard time eating that spinach and broccoli because he was always eyeing the cake!

2--And Havner says that if God explained everything to us about all the good that is to come, we might have a hard time eating our spinach and broccoli down here!

5. That said, the Bibles *DOES*, in fact, give us *glimpses & hints* of what heaven will be like.

A--For example, Luke 16 seems to indicate that in heaven, we'll all know and enjoy the company of those whom we loved on earth (our friends, family, spouse, etc.). ²

1--We'll know them in a *different* way than we do now, but we'll know them!

2--Someone once asked W.A. Criswell (a former pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX), "*How will we know each other when we get to heaven?*" And he replied, "*Friend, we won't REALLY know each other UNTIL we get to heaven!*"

B--What's more is that Revelation 7 tells us that in heaven, there'll be people from *all* races, nations, socio-economic backgrounds, and political & theological persuasions ³ -- so we better get used to people who're different than us down here!

1--When we get to heaven, God won't ask us if we're Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic or non-denominational, or Progressive, Evangelical, traditional, contemporary, or Democrat, Republican, or Independent -- because we'll all be *one* with God!

2--Some of you have heard me already say that I've heard that heaven will be made up of at least three surprises:

Surprise #1 will be that we'll see people we didn't expect to see there.

Surprise #2 will be that we'll *miss* people we expected to see there.

Surprise #3 will be that WE will be there!

C--Another thing that *numerous* scriptures tell us is that heaven will be a place so filled and overflowing with the presence and power and love of God that its inhabitants can't help but sing His praises around His throne forever. ⁴

1--Now, that may sound a little dull right now, but remember that in heaven, praise is the chocolate cake -- it'll be what we simply can't get enough of!

2--So, if we're going to be singing God's praise for eternity, it won't hurt for us to start practicing down here in our times of worship!

6. But perhaps even more important than these glimpses of what we *WILL* find in heaven are the indications in the Bible of what we will *NOT* find there.

A--Verse 4 of today's scripture, for instance, says that in the Holy City, there'll be no more tears, crying, pain, or any other physical ailment / need -- and that even death itself will be no more!

B--In other scriptures we find that in heaven, there'll be no more loneliness, fear, sorrow, depression, violence, or suffering. ⁵

C--In other words, all that we consider bad about *this* life will not be able to exist in heaven because it's *God's* home -- and trouble, fear and turmoil cannot exist where God dwells.

D--And the good news is that not only is this wonderful place the home of *God*, but it's *also* the home of all His children (his "saints") -- of all those who claim the name "Christian" by receiving a new heart from Jesus, and by following him in their daily lives as a disciple.

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7. My point is that the faithful "saints of God," both living and dead, and whose lives we celebrate today, have a place reserved for them in what the Bible calls "*the Holy City*."

A--So let me ask this morning: ...Will YOU be among them when YOUR life is over?

1--It's true that there's *much MORE* to Christianity than simply an end-destination.

2--But that destination IS one of the great "fringe benefits" of our faith!

B--So my prayer for each of us today is that as we each live out our lives here on earth, we might also know the assurance that *this* place of beauty and wonder -- this "*Holy City*" -- is also OUR home and destiny as one of God's "saints," as well.

8. PRAYER: "[*BEGIN with invitation for those who don't know Jesus to receive him as personal Lord and Savior... then...*] ...*Lord, Jesus, the Bible tells us that if we follow your son Jesus, then we are your saints -- we may not always FEEL like one, but your Word tells us that you died and rose again so that we might BE one. So Lord, give to us today the assurance that as we faithfully live out our faith here on earth, that one day we will also live in your Holy City: the Home of ALL your saints. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*"

9. [REMEMBRANCE OF OUR SAINTS (Candles lit, bells rung, and prayer said for those who've died since last year...)]

10. [CLOSING 11am HYMN: UMH#701, "When We All Get To Heaven"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Of course, as soon as I say the word "saint," some people immediately conjure up an image of some famous person from the past set in stone, in a statue, or depicted in a stained glass window -- someone long dead who's been officially declared a "saint" by some church. But if we look in the Bible carefully, we'll find that that image just isn't biblical. No. In both the Old and the New Testaments, the word "Saint" simply means *"one set apart for God's use or purpose."* The Hebrew people were often called God's "saints" because God considered them "set apart" as His own possession -- they were His own children. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul refers to ALL Christians as "saints of God," because ALL Christians are "holy/set apart" as God's own.

And yet, so often, when we think about a "saint," we somehow think of someone dead who seemed absolutely "perfect" in every way -- that a "saint" never sins, never make mistakes, and never does anything wrong. Part of this idea comes from the practice of the early Christians of calling "saints" those who were put to death because of their faith (the words "saint" & "martyr" have the same root). But in a much truer sense, a biblical "saint" is not simply someone "perfect" because of some great thing they did -- sainthood, in fact, has NOTHING to do with WHO we are. Instead, it has to do with WHOSE we are -- so that if we're a Christian, then we belong to God, and therefore WE are one of His "saints," NOT because we're perfect, but because Jesus Christ redeemed us by his own death on the cross, and thereby paid for us to belong to God. This refers not only to those who've passed on to heaven, but to those of us still here on earth! So a "saint," you see, is simply someone through whom the light of God's love & grace shines.

² Read Luke 16:19-31.

³ Read Revelation 7.

⁴ For example, read Isaiah 6, Psalm 30:12, 34, 45:17, 100, Revelation 4,5,7,11,15 and 19.

⁵ For example, read Revelation 7:16-17.