

Section 6, Week 52
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

God's Shalom

We don't think twice about letting our children have a furry kitten, a cuddly puppy, or a bunny rabbit for a pet. But what would you say to buying them a lion or a leopard, or a snake—say, a cobra? A day is coming when God's peace will so cover the earth that even the animals will be as docile as our favorite pets. Read about it in Isaiah 11:6-9 (p. xxx).

Day 3

My Identity

Heaven on Earth

Almost everyone in America, churched or unchurched, knows that "the worship hour" is on Sunday morning. Even Christians have fallen prey to the notion that worship is relegated to certain times. Apparently that's not true in heaven. In Revelation, chapter 4, (p. xxx) the apostle John saw something that could change the way we worship on earth.

Day 4

Impact

Forever Grateful

A seed of pride can take root in our hearts without our awareness. Soon, we think others are bigger sinners than we. When that happens, we begin to lose our gratitude for our salvation and stop anticipating heaven. The apostle Paul lived in a state of heaven-like awareness of what God had done for him. Read his words in 1 Timothy 1:15-17 (p. xxx).

Day 5

Implication

A Cross-Cultural Experience

Almost everyone today has the pleasure of getting to know people from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. New languages and lifestyles are becoming a part of everyday life. And based on something the apostle John saw in his vision of heaven, this may make our transition there easier! Discover what he saw in Revelation 5:9, 13 (p. xxx).

Section 6, Week 52, Day 1
Revelation 21:10-22:5
374 words

The Promise
The Language of Heaven

Revelation 21:10-22:5 The Bible consists of many types of writings: historical (e.g., 1, 2 Kings), wisdom (e.g., Proverbs), songs (e.g., Psalms), prophecy (e.g., Daniel), biography (e.g., Luke), and apocalyptic (e.g., Revelation). It is a testament to the oversight of the Holy Spirit that all these literary styles produced a consistent revelation of the story of redemption (2 Pet. 1:21).

The most challenging portions of Scripture to interpret are those written in apocalyptic language—specifically, the book of Revelation. Often called “the Apocalypse” (Greek *apokalupsis* means “revelation”), the Revelation given to the apostle John has come to define what apocalyptic literature is: dramatic, cataclysmic, figurative, exaggerated, symbolic—and difficult to interpret. Specifically, how literally should the images in apocalyptic literature be interpreted? No part of Revelation’s meaning holds more interest for Christians than the portion describing their eternal home, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2).

The picture given to the apostle John of the eternal home of the righteous in Christ is . . . breathtaking! And that is exactly the result the language is intended to have. Whether describing evil earlier in his vision, or eternal glory and beauty in this portion, John pushes the human language to its limits to paint a picture of a heavenly reality. The city is always pictured as coming down out of heaven (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10)—it is a gift from God. It is measured in specifics—meaning it is set apart and protected. It is in the shape of a cube—as was the Holy of Holies in the Temple. There are twelve gates and twelve foundations—uniting the sons of Jacob with the apostles of the church. There are precious stones of every description—establishing its value as immeasurable. There is no sun or moon—for the glory of God and the Lamb of God are its light. And only the righteous may enter to partake of the tree of life—linking it to the original garden home of the righteous in Genesis.

We need not interpret every jot and tittle correctly in order to benefit from John’s revelation of heaven. It is enough to know that even the grandest apocalyptic language is not sufficient to describe the glory and beauty awaiting the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem.

God’s Promise to You: “No words can describe the home I have prepared in heaven for you.”

Section 6, Week 52, Day 2
Isaiah 11:6-9
375 words

God's Identity
God's Shalom

Isaiah 11:6-9 Whether they admit it or not, most people are fascinated by the nature and wildlife shows on television. With eyes half-covered in mock disgust, we watch a lizard bite the head off a hapless insect, a lioness clamp on to the throat of a doomed gazelle, and a python squeeze the life out of a furry rodent—before swallowing it whole. What's going on here? Besides the promptings of conscience, how do we know violence—especially violence in the animal kingdom—is not God's ideal?

The prophets of Israel painted pictures of an age of “shalom” (Hebrew for peace) that would come upon the earth. Peace would be brought by the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), God's anointed one, the Messiah. We know from Isaiah 11 that the one bringing that peace would be a descendant of Jesse, the father of king David (v. 1). Jesus Christ was that person (Matt. 1:5-6; Luke 4:31-32). The prophets saw the Messiah instituting an age in which everything would be returned to God's ideal: Justice and righteousness and a knowledge of the Lord would fill the earth (Isa. 11:2-5). One of the most remarkable things that would happen is that all of nature would enjoy God's shalom as well. The natural enemies in the animal world would be at peace. Those animals which humans fear would become like children's pets—“for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Often in Scripture, animals are used as pictures of people. But in Isaiah's description of Messianic peace and righteousness, it appears that literal animals are intended. The peace of God will be so pervasive that carnivores will become herbivores as they were in the Garden of Eden (v. 7; Gen. 1:30). Isaiah and the apostle Paul would have agreed about creation, the latter seeing the earth as “subject to frustration,” wanting to be “liberated from its bondage,” a bondage brought about by sin (Rom. 8:19-22; Gen. 3:17-18).

God is a God of peace, and when his rule fills the earth even nature will be at peace. As beautiful, fascinating, and enjoyable as the animal kingdom is, there are delights waiting to spring forth that we have never seen or imagined.

God's Promise to You: “There are parts of my creation you've never seen at peace; but you will.”

Section 6, Week 52, Day 3
Revelation 4
372 words

My Identity Heaven on Earth

Revelation 4 It is a fact that worship has become “an hour” in the life of many Christians and their churches. Not that God doesn’t desire and receive our worship whenever we offer it—he does. But “the worship hour”—usually 11:00-12:00 A.M. on Sunday morning—is actually a cultural notion that has taken on biblical stature for many. Actually, a worship “hour” is only 1/24th of the truth according to what the apostle John saw happening in heaven.

Our verb “worship” entered the English language in about the 12th century, and made its way to religious contexts a century later. The verb came from a compound noun consisting of “worth” and “ship” which meant distinction or dignity. That gradually became respect and reverence, the verb form adding action: To convey or ascribe worth, or respect and reverence, to another. So far, so good. On Sunday mornings, in the worship hour, we convey respect and reverence—we ascribe worth and worthiness—to God. But in heaven, that activity goes on—and will continue to go on—unceasingly.

John’s apocalyptic vision, his look behind the veil separating heaven from earth, revealed a look into the throne room of God. The brilliance he saw radiating from the throne was the glory of God (v. 4; 1 Tim. 6:6). And surrounding God’s throne were additional thrones where 24 elders sat—elders who probably represent saints from all ages who will populate heaven (12 for the tribes of Israel, 12 for the New Testament apostles). Four angelic beings were centered around the throne who, “day and night . . . never stop” worshiping God. But John also that whenever the angelic beings worshiped, the 24 elders would “fall down . . . and worship him . . . [and] lay their crowns before the throne.” Angels and saints—created beings who day and night ascribe worthiness to God: “For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Rather than a “worship hour,” there appears to be a worship “lifestyle” in heaven. Because God never stops being worthy—we daily “live and move and have our being” in him (Acts 17:28)—a lifestyle of worship would seem appropriate on earth as well.

God’s Promise to You: “I will be present in your praises wherever you choose to worship me.”

Section 6, Week 52, Day 4
1 Timothy 1:15-17
375 words

Impact
Forever Grateful

1 Timothy 1:15-17 It seems to be a defining characteristic of redeemed sinners that, the longer they are exposed to the grace of God, the greater their own sin seems. And the greater their own sin seems, the more amazed they are at the mercy of God. Such thoughts surely motivated John Newton's words in "Amazing Grace:" Amazing grace . . . that saved a wretch like me."

Another saint who wrote plainly of the measure of his sin was the apostle Paul. So struck by the mercy and grace of God was Paul that he concluded himself to be the "worst" of all sinners! Surely many people before Paul had committed more heinous crimes than he. How was it, therefore, that he saw himself as the worst of sinners? Because sinfulness has less to do with knowing who we are than it does with knowing who God is. Probably 30 years had passed between the time of Paul's conversion—when he saw himself as the chief defender of God's law—to the time he saw himself as the chief of sinners, the greatest lawbreaker of all. During those three decades, Paul came to know his heart, and the heart of God, intimately. To the degree that one is able on earth, Paul probably had developed an awareness of what heaven was going to be like: life in the presence of unlimited mercy.

The only way Paul could have written, "Now to the King . . . be honor and glory for ever and ever" was to understand that the "eternal, immortal, invisible" God had patiently brought him to salvation. Paul knew that his covetous heart knew no bounds (Rom. 7:7-12) and that it would take an unbounded God—with unlimited patience, grace, and mercy—to forgive him. Every Christian that reaches that understanding knows he or she, not the apostle, is the worst of sinners. It is that realization that fuels service to God on earth and ascriptions of honor to God forever in heaven.

God doesn't delight in our self-abasement, but he does delight in our worship. He delights in it now, and will all the more for eternity. A fresh look at ourselves, in light of who he is, is a good place to begin.

God's Promise to You: "I value your gratitude as much as you value your salvation."

Section 6, Week 52, Day 5
Revelation 5:9, 13
375 words

Implication A Cross-Cultural Experience

Revelation 5:9, 13 Want to prime your imaginative pump regarding what heaven will be like? Then pay a visit to the huge, bustling, noisy, open-stall produce and meat markets found in most large metropolitan cities. There, if your eyes and ears are open, you'll be baptized into a cross-cultural cacophony that will make heaven a bit more familiar when you arrive.

If you've never been to one of these markets, they are less like traditional American food shopping and more like the markets of the world. Their business is built on attracting every ethnic group in the city. Produce and meats that many Americans have never seen, can't pronounce, and have never tasted are there in abundance. But it's not the food you'll be looking for—it's the people. Visitors will lose count of the numbers of different languages they hear spoken, and will find themselves staring at the native dress worn to market by many. At the checkout lines, some markets' cashiers will be wearing small badges indicating the languages they speak so that shoppers can converse in their native tongues. Shoppers from "every tribe and language and people and nation" will serve up a little slice of heaven.

The apostle John was not at a market, but looking into a vision of heaven. What he saw there was worship of Jesus Christ by people redeemed from the four corners of the earth. Think of it: Will the redeemed of all ages praise Christ in their native languages? Will their glorified bodies reflect their ethnic diversity? Will the colors of their native dress be illuminated by the brilliance of the glory of the lamb? We will one day know for sure, but until then, we know this: "Praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever" are to "him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

It's never been more possible for every person to have cross-cultural acquaintances than in our modern world. God is redeeming people from every corner of the globe for himself, and perhaps he has brought some from other cultures into your life. As you prepare to go to heaven yourself, see if someone from another tribe, language, or nation has been called by God to go with you.

God's Promise to You: "I have called you to call others to worship the Lamb forever."