



Sermon Growth Guide

October 22, 2023

Where I Am Going

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Lead Me Home - Where I Am Going

Revelation 21:9-27

Key Verse: Revelation 21:10

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

Big Idea: God has revealed some of what our eternal and heavenly home will be like. It’s an incomplete picture, but enough is given to increase our desires, hopes, and excitement!



Foundations

This week we continue our **Lead Me Home** sermon series. Throughout this series we have focused on the truth that God created us to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever in a perfect and heavenly home that He created for us. And entering that home comes by way of God’s wonderful grace and through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ!

The Book of Revelation is one of the most complex books in the Bible. But despite its complexity, it contains a simple and powerful message that God’s plan of salvation will triumph, that evil will be overcome, and that God will gather the faithful and devoted followers of Jesus into heaven where all things will be made new.

The Apostle John wrote Revelation and described what he was privileged to see: *A glimpse of heaven*. Using an abundance of biblical and apocalyptic imagery, John described what he saw of the new Jerusalem, all of which flowed from the intense and perfect glory of God. Precious gemstones, walls built from jasper, and pure gold are among the features of this heavenly vision. Each element has significance and meaning as they reveal the nature of God and the place that He has prepared for us.

Though sometimes confusing, Revelation conveys one central truth: God wins! And when we know how the story ends, it allows us to live with confidence, hope and joy on this side of heaven!

Understanding God’s Word

Read Revelation 21:9-21.

What impresses you about the elements of the vision of Heaven that John witnessed?

In verses 22-27, how is the new Jerusalem different from the Jerusalem of the first century?

Applying God’s Word

We are privileged to read the Apostle John’s words and also receive a glimpse of the glory of Heaven. Seeing how this new Heaven is described, and knowing the promise of eternity that awaits us, how might this influence how you view and worship God today?

Awe might be a good word for this vision of Heaven. To what extent do you experience awe in your relationship with God? In our corporate worship at First Pres?

Witnessing God’s Word

We live in a world that often can seem hopeless. People seem more polarized and divided than ever before. Tensions have escalated between nations. Violence seems to be commonplace. The Christian witness in a world such as this is essential and can influence a powerful transformation. How might you share the hope and joy you’ve found in Christ with others, and let them know that God loves them and invites them into His home through Jesus Christ?

How many of you have bought a car sight unseen? How about a house? My friends moved with the Air Force a dozen times. They had a system where the husband, Michael, went ahead, found a house, often bought a house, then brought Melissa and the girls to the house and they saw it for the first time the day they moved in. Wow. He says it never failed. Melissa remembers one filled with cockroaches, but Mike says it never failed! He was so good at it we had him do that for us when we moved to Oxford and they were already there. He did great. It was the perfect place for us. We gave thanks for Michael every time we walked through our front door. Here is your Good News challenge this week: “What would be your perfect home?” Start a conversation with a friend. We all have visions of our perfect home, but deeper than that is the need to get to our true home, our ultimate home, the fulfillment of our deepest longings—home with Christ. We all long for home.

Lead Me Home. Where I Am Going.

Where are we going? What happens after I die? What is heaven really like? These questions are academic for most of our lives, curiosities, until they mean everything to us, when a loved one passes, or when we ourselves are watching the day approaching. Some of the most meaningful conversations I have had in ministry have been bedside, talking, praying, imagining. Because, in truth, none of us really knows. We think, can I get a brochure here? A few pics? A travel website? We have what we have, only what God has allowed us to have, and it is sufficient. We are not nomads following our thirsts aimlessly across the landscape; we are pilgrims headed somewhere sacred and definite. I couldn't let go of this quote from a commentary on Romans last week: “The Christian pilgrim is on the road to glory, assured that the promises of the word and the spiritual energy provided for his ‘walk’ are not illusory. As he sees the dark tunnel of death ahead of him, he is confident that beyond it the road leads

on to his destination, though it remains unseen.” (Everett Harrison, *Romans*.)

Revelation gives us pictures of heaven. It's crystal clear, isn't it? Not really. It's more like looking at an abstract piece of art. You can describe it, but you can't fully explain it. It is a picture of heaven. We have studied the redemptive history of God: Creation, Fall, Redemption and now Consummation. What happens in the end? This week it is about where we are going, next week about what is coming our way. I do try to answer when people ask what happens when we die. We do have the Scriptures. In John 14, Jesus promises there is a place for us after we die. To be absent from the body is to be present with Christ, says 2 Corinthians 5. We don't need to know how to get to where Jesus is, because Jesus promises that He will come Himself to guide us home. That's grace. Here's how I understand it. When we breath our last, Jesus arrives to take our souls into His company. For a while, we are bodiless and spiritually present to Christ. But what is coming after that is the time when all things will be consummated, finished, put right. All debts squared, all justice conferred, and at that time we will be reunited with resurrection bodies and dwell on a renewed earth with God forever. That's how I think it works. That's how the Reformed tradition understands it. We don't spend a lot of time parsing out the details of the end times, the plagues and the kingdoms, and the dragons, et cetera. You can learn a lot studying all that. It can increase your confidence that no matter how terrible things get in this world, God is still in control. But it is secondary to the primary truth: When I die Jesus will be with me; when all is done Jesus will rule over a renewed creation and I will be part of that.

Where am I going? Let's look at the brochure. This is a long passage, so I want to break it into three themes: The City, The Presence, and The Life. First, The City. John is taken up a high mountain, just like Isaiah, just like

Ezekiel, to see the City of God coming down. We go to heaven for a while, but heaven comes to earth forever. The city is ornate. Should we take this for an architectural rendering? Probably not. The walls are 200 feet thick and the gates are made of pearls the size of mac trucks. This is mostly symbolic. The angel said, let me show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then showed John a city. The bride of Christ is the church, which we can all be grateful to be the bride (even us guys, no matter what we need to wear). This is the people of God, the children of God. The city is how we live together. The walls represent security, order, and peace. The numbers speak of completeness. The cubic square demonstrates fulfillment. Everything about this city fulfills the promises of God going back through covenant history, frankly, to Genesis when God originally made this earth to be our forever home. For a time, it fell into disrepair, decay, destruction and foreign dictatorship under the power of sin and death. Now no more. “The sinfully ruined creation of Genesis is restored in the sacrificially renewed creation of Revelation.” (Eugene Peterson) Where I am going, the city of this world gives way to the City of God.

The Presence. “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” (Revelation 21:22-23) A temple is a place to meet with God in a world emptied out of His presence, or where sin obscures His presence. There is no temple in this city. The whole city is the temple, the presence of the Lord. We taste this already. “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16) We are God’s temple on earth right now, and whenever we gather we feel the sense of God’s presence more strongly, like coals brushed together at the base of

a fire. That is just a foretaste of when the city of God comes down, the earth is restored, and the knowledge of God covers the earth like the waters cover the sea. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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.’” (Revelation 21:3-4) Where I am going, I will be in the presence of the Lord.

The Life. What God is telling us, clearly, is that there is life after death. This life is not our end. This life is only prologue, introduction, prelude. The real life is yet to come. That life is not about tears and warfare and injustice and pain. That life is about order, and beauty, glorious light and fullest life. I can’t fully explain it, but the Bible does describe it—and in flesh and blood terms, in material terms, in time and space terms. This is theology in stone. Heaven is not some cartoonish, mystical state full of bodiless spirits floating around; nor is it some distant paradise we have never conceived. The new heavens and earth are new because they are fresh, restored, but recognizable. We know this place. We have experienced it in part. When we pray “on earth as it is in heaven” we expect to feel a little bit of it right now, and as much as God’s heavenly will has its way in our earthly lives, we do taste it. So, when we arrive, when the door opens and we enter in, we will say, “Oh, yes! I know this place. I smelled this air before, but only a little. Here it is in full. I knew this goodness and purity in part, now here it is in fullness. I have seen this beauty, been captured by it, but now it seems I am entering into it and bathing in it and becoming part of it.” It isn’t unrecognizable; it is the home our hearts have longed for all along. Where I am going, I will live the life that is truly life.

Here is home with God. Peace with creation; peace with one another; peace with ourselves; peace with God. It appears to us like a crystalline, pure, gleaming city of glorious light and filled with the presence of God. One commentator said this is what it is like to read up to this point in Revelation: "From the smoke and pain and heat it is a relief to pass into the clear, clean atmosphere of the eternal morning where the breath of heaven is sweet and the vast city of God sparkles like a diamond in the radiance of his presence." (J. B. Moffatt) That is what life is like. From all the smoke and pain and fire we are ready to enter the cool, clear morning air of the Kingdom. But one last point in this passage. Although this is universal in scope, and the invitation is for all people, this is not universalism. Not all will make it home. "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27)

Can you see this city? Can you feel a little bit of this presence? Can you trust and receive a hint, a glimpse of this life that is truly life? The more you can see it, the hungrier you get for it, and the hungrier you are for it, more you invest in it. Jesus told us to put our money toward it. This is the key verse for our stewardship campaign: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) What have you stored up in heaven? Do you periodically tip Jesus in good times, or do you systematically invest in the Kingdom of God?

Next week we will bring our stewardship commitments for 2024 and lay them down before the Lord. I encourage you to store up. Take the next step toward a true tithe, ten percent of your budget. This is not a fundraising campaign; this is an invitation into deeper discipleship into a deeper

relationship with Jesus that actually includes your finances. This year we are hoping to find 100 people to trust Jesus with their money for the first time. We are praying for 100 people who have never given to come next week with \$100 to give, for the first time, to the work of the Lord. If that's you, let us know on the card next week, and we want to celebrate with you and get you a gift. You have stored up treasure in heaven.

The more you trust God with your life now, the more you follow Jesus now, the more you will find yourself at home when you truly get home. "Oh, I know this place." Home is out there. It is on the way. My longing is not just endless, existential angst. It is a thirst that will one day be slaked, a hunger that will one day be sated in a glorious exercise of feasting before the Lord in the City of God with joy. This promise is not an empty encouragement. It is the statement of a reality not yet present, but on the way.

John was taken up a high mountain; there is no mountain you can climb. You can't get there from here, but what if someone came to take you? The grace of God, the grace that chases down prodigals, the grace that comes for lost sheep, this grace will carry you home and will walk along the way with you every step and every turn. "You can't get there from here," said James K A Smith. "But what if someone came to get you? And what if that someone not only knows where the end of the road is but promises to accompany you the rest of the way, to never leave you or forsake you until you arrive? This is the God who runs down the road to meet prodigals. Grace isn't high-speed transport all the way to the end but the gift of his presence the rest of the way." The book of life is the Lamb's book. The Lamb born in Bethlehem. The Lamb who was slain. The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb who now reigns, risen from the dead. It's Jesus' book. He writes the names. Turn all your loyalties toward Him.