

9MAY10 Text: Rev. 21:10-11 ***“And He carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like that of a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”***

Cats are, by nature, very curious creatures. Our cat quickly explores any change we make to his living environment in the parsonage garage, whether it is an empty box we place there before it is trashed or a new item being stored out in the garage. He looks at it, slowly approaches it, sniffs it, and then climbs inside, if it is a box or some other open item. People are often very curious too. Just watch a young child who has just started to crawl or walk. Everything is **new** and **interesting** to them. They have a sense of awe and wonder as they seek to satisfy the curiosity about the world in which they live. By the time we reach adulthood, much of that awe and wonder and curiosity about the world, that marked our lives as children, has been lost. Perhaps we as adults are too busy or we feel we have become too knowledgeable to be curious about the world or to stand in awe and wonder of its beauty and its secrets.

I would bet that most of us here this morning are still curious about some things we have not yet seen or experienced. There are places in the world to which we'd like to travel—Hawaii or Europe or Australia—faraway places that are different than mid-Michigan. I would also bet that most of us here this morning have more than a little curiosity about what heaven will be like. It's place we can't travel to ahead of time. **In fact, it is true that we really can't even really picture what heaven will be like.** St. Paul writes in Corinthians, ***“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him....”*** (1 Cor. 2:9) Heaven is beyond our imagination and if it wouldn't be for what God has told us about heaven, we would know nothing at all. In this morning's epistle lesson, God graciously gives us a symbolical picture of heaven to help us appreciate it and long for it. It helps our curiosity and helps answer the question,

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

One thing we learn from our epistle lesson today is that in heaven **we will be living forever in the presence of God.** No distance will separate us from God but He will dwell among us and among all His redeemed children. In the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, God is the only light. God's presence in our epistle lesson is described as a **shimmering radiance,**

which causes the heavenly city to shine with the brilliance of a precious jewel, like that of a pure, clear diamond! Think about the sun and what it gives us in this world: warmth, light, beauty as it rises in the east and sets in the west. Think about the moon and the benefits it provides us: light to guide us at night and its beauty as it passes through its lunar phases. In the Holy City of the heavenly Jerusalem, neither the sun nor the moon are needed, for we are told that the Lamb of God, the glorified Christ, is its light. **His glory, the glory of God Himself, gives all the radiance that is needed for anyone who lives in heaven!**

Living forever in the presence of God in heaven will be experiencing God's glory firsthand! Remember the Children of Israel as they were led out of Egypt through the wilderness? They were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They regularly saw this manifestation of God's glory and presence. By this cloud of His presence, this "**shekinah**" as the cloud of glory was called, God visibly demonstrated that He was **with them**, that He was **among them** to bless and guide with all of His attributes.

What is God's glory? **It is the sum total of all of His attributes—His power and creative ability, His wisdom and knowledge, His love and His mercy.** In the Holy City of the New Jerusalem, God's glory is **directly** and **immediately** available to those who live with Him there. Each day, you and I struggle in our individual lives with limited resources or handicapped abilities as we live in a world of dwindling resources. Imagine heaven, **all the attributes that God is and has are immediately and directly available to us and directly applicable to any situation.** That is why in the heavenly Jerusalem, there shall be no want of any kind, for God will provide all that is needed. In the heavenly Jerusalem, there shall be **no more unanswered questions**, for God will give us every answer.

A second thing we learn from our epistle lesson this morning is that **heaven is a place set apart from all that is unclean and unholy.** In heaven we will be in **exclusive company**, surrounded by all the rest of God's saints. In the apostle John's vision that we call the Revelation, heaven is seen as a **walled city**. In any city, walls **divide** and walls **protect**. The same is true in the Holy City above. The walls of heaven remind us that unrepentant sinners will have no part of heaven. They will be forever outside of heaven's walls, shut out and cut off from the Lord. That's the same message in Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the foolish virgins shut out of the wedding banquet. Whereas the saints in heaven enjoy bliss and eternal happiness in the presence of God and His glory, the unregenerate are eternally

separate from God and forever locked out of paradise by their unbelief, forever to experience eternal regret, sorrow and woe. But all within the Holy City are eternally safe from all that has been miserable in this life and need no longer fear any attacks by their earthly enemies of sin, death, the world and the devil. How wonderful it will be to walk the streets of heaven without the things that make life in this world so burdensome!

The walled city of heaven, the New Jerusalem, **is also a guarded city.** The vision reveals to St. John that **angels guard the gates** of entrance to the Holy City. Just as the tree of life in the Garden of Eden long ago, after our first parents fell into sin, was guarded by cherubim and a flaming sword so that Adam and Eve could not sneak back into the paradise of Eden to eat of the fruit from the tree of life, so also in Paradise above...12 angels guard the 12 gates, only permitting entrance to those with the proper credentials to enter. What is proper credential necessary for entrance to heaven? Only one thing is necessary. Only one thing is accepted....and its not "Visa or MasterCard." **The one thing accepted to gain entrance into heaven is faith in Jesus Christ.** Faith in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, trusting Him and Him alone, placing one's confidence in His blood-bought redemption for all of our sins, redemption He purchased and won for us on Calvary with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Those who have such faith in Jesus Christ are called "saints" in the Bible; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. All who have such faith in Christ approach the Holy City wearing the spotless robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. When they reach the gate of heaven, they are permitted to enter into the glory of God's presence. It is comforting to know that **at any given moment in your life and mine, we can be confident of our entrance into heaven, not because of what we have done, not because of our works, but because of Christ's perfect righteousness, because of Christ's great work of atonement on the cross.** His precious blood has cleansed us from all our sin. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that makes us ready for heaven and clothes us in that spotless garment that the angels recognize as the robe of entrance into heaven, the passport, as it were, to enter into the Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem.

The final thing that we learn from our epistle lesson this morning, the apostle John's vision of paradise which causes us awe and wonder and satisfies a bit of curiosity about heaven is this: **we can learn that the opportunity for eternal life and heaven is open to all.** On each of the four walls of the Holy City are three gates, gates that open to four different directions—3 to the north, 3 to the east, 3 to the south and 3 to the west. Some cities have only

one gate through which all people must enter. With these twelve gates open to the four points of the compass, we can surely know that **all nations** from the four corners of the earth are welcome in heaven. *Human divisions and things that cause separation in our world, things like race and age and social status, have no meaning whatsoever in heaven.* The names of God's chosen people are on the twelve gates—representing all of God's elect, all of God's chosen. **The fact of the matter is that God knows we are coming to the Holy City long before we get there.** In Christ Jesus our Savior, your name and mine and the names of all believers, have been written into the Lamb's Book of Life, the directory of all the redeemed saints of God who dwell in heaven. **First written in the Book of Life in Holy Baptism, God's Spirit is at work throughout the Christian's life, gathering us as God's people together, enlightening us by the Word of God, sanctifying our lives according to the Word of God, and helping us to live a more godly life and behave more Christ-like in word and deed, finally keeping us in the true faith until God calls us home to Himself.**

It is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit works so hard in your life and mine. The 12 apostles are represented in this vision as being the twelve precious foundations stones of the Holy City. Indeed, what would we know about Jesus had God not worked through the apostles to give us the "good news" of our Savior in written form? It is only through the Word of God, we learn of Jesus as our Savior, that we are led to repentance and faith, to forgiveness and salvation, and ultimately the splendors of eternal life with Christ in heaven. Without the Word of God, we would be **lost**, without map or guide to Jesus, unable to find heaven apart from Him. With the Word of God, **we have what we need** for life in this world and we have what we need to prepare us for life in the world to come.

What will heaven be like? The spectacular from the book of Revelation concludes with these closing verses from which our epistle lesson is taken this morning. **It satisfies a bit of our curiosity about heaven.** We are reminded again this morning that heaven will indeed be a joyful place of living forever in the presence of God, eternally safe and secure in His radiant splendor. We all have loved ones who have departed this life before us. They already walk with Jesus Christ our Lord in the glory of heaven. God grant that each of us also continue walking by faith in Jesus unto the glory of life everlasting with Him. Amen.