

Revelation 21:1-4

“Heaven Is Not For You”

This morning we are concluding a three week sermon series I call, “Hell, Here, Heaven.” Two weeks ago we talked about hell from the stand point of fleeing the wrath to come. We decided we have three choices. Number One, we can choose to go our own way and live in hell. Number Two, we can choose to run from hell, or flee the wrath to come and wind up running away from God too. Or we can choose door number three and choose to run toward God. Last week Pastor Josh Britton spoke to us about the ministry we are called to in the here and now. Today we are going to talk about heaven. I have something really important to share with y’all this morning about heaven. This is gonna blow your minds. Are you ready? Are you ready for me to tell you this super important thing about heaven? Are you sure? Okay. Here goes. When it comes to heaven... you aint going. **(pause)** When it comes to heaven you are not going. **(pause)** I am not going. None of us are going to heaven. **(pause)** Why? **(pause)** Because heaven, as it exists today, will not exist tomorrow. There will not be a heaven to go to. God will not sit in heaven on some high throne. God will no longer be up there; or even over there. At the end of times, when Christ comes in final victory we will not go to heaven. We will not be separated from God any longer. The old things will pass away. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. The holy city of Jerusalem will come down to rest on the new earth. We will live in God’s holy city and God will live with us; among us; in us, and it will be better than heaven is today. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain. We are not going to heaven when we die. When Jesus returns in final victory we will go to the new heaven and the new earth to live in God’s holy city, the new Jerusalem.

Okay. By a show of hands. Who is confused by what I just said? **(pause)** I know, right. New Heaven? New Earth? Did the preacher’s head get too much sun while he was on vacation last week? What’s going on? Alright. Here’s the deal. When it comes to talking about heaven and hell things can get pretty confusing. What we really want to know is what happens to us when we die and what do I need to do now to end up where I want to go?

Let’s begin with this. We cannot earn our way into heaven. Amen? **Amen.** Amen?! **Amen!** Salvation is not for sale. We cannot make a deal with God to get salvation. Sorry President Trump, there is no art to this deal. There isn’t an old deal. There isn’t a new deal. There is no deal. There is just this. **“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). If we want to have eternal life in the New Jerusalem we need to understand this point above all others. God loves us. God loves you. Yes? **Yes.** God loves you! Yes?! **Yes!** God loves us so much God created a way for us to have eternal life. God created a way for God to live with us in the same way God lived with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sisters and brothers, please, please, please remember this. There is no sweeter place, no greater joy, no better happiness than being in the company of God. There is nothing in this world that feels as good as being close to God. Amen? **Amen.** Brothers and sisters that is heaven. Heaven is not a trophy to be earned or a destination to be reached. Heaven is being closer than humanly possible to God. However, “for the things we want most... there is a cost which must be paid in the end.”<sup>1</sup> None of us can bargain with God. None of us, as the creatures God created have anything we can use to barter with our creator; and yet, every one of us bears the stains of both original sin and our own sin. To put it another way; we aint right. Our God is a God of justice. The scales of justice must be balanced, and by our God’s love for us, God sent God’s only Son to make the choice we would not, and to pay the price we cannot. Jesus is the Christ, the anointed King, and only begotten Son of God. Jesus Christ paid the price for all sin. Jesus Christ died for you and for me, all so that we would have the chance to accept everlasting life. We have been given this wonderful gift. What will we do with it? What should we do with God’s gift of salvation?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pirates\\_of\\_the\\_caribbean\\_3/quotes/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pirates_of_the_caribbean_3/quotes/) (last viewed 7-20-17)

You know, this is probably a good time to point out that John's Revelation – that's one Revelation and not several. John's Revelation was not written for us. These are not twenty first century Christians who get upset when our coffee is too hot at McDonalds, or who skip out on church so they can watch a Panther's game, or catch the Nascar race. These are not the Christians who are afraid to pray in public because they are worried about feeling embarrassed. John's Revelation was written to the followers of the Way of Jesus Christ who were being persecuted by the Romans. The Romans were arresting people – and dragging them out of their homes. Their wives and children were arrested as well. The Romans would then beat and torture them. These early Christians would then be thrown out into the coliseums where animals who had been starved and abused would be let loose into the arena. Many of these early Christians were gored by bulls or trampled by cows, or torn apart by lions, tigers and bears – Oh my! The Christians to whom John is sharing this Revelation are are being tortured, beaten and mauled to death by crazed animals because they refuse to deny Jesus Christ is their risen Lord and Savior. **(pause)** No, John's Revelation was not written for us. John's Revelation was written for those who face life threatening atrocities and repercussions to their families and friends because of their outspoken faith. John's Revelation was written to those who need hope in the face of their fears. First century Christians had more reason to be afraid because of their faith than anyone here. **(pause)** And yet they remained faithful. In fact, Christianity grew and spread. They didn't do it for reward. They weren't trying to earn something better. First century Christians lived out their faith for no better reason than because they knew how good it is to be loved by God; and they believed it could get better still. Were they afraid for their lives? You bet! However, John's Revelation gave them hope. It was kinda like a Darius Rucker song.

It won't be like this for long.  
One day we'll wake up laughin'  
**'Cause Jesus brought us home.**  
This phase are gonna fly by  
if we can just hold on  
It won't be like this for long.

"It Won't Be Like This for Long" by Darius Rucker. Bold type was changed by me.

Sisters and brothers the hope of this morning's passage is that for those who are suffering with terrible illnesses, this phase of life will end. For those who face oppression for their faith in Jesus Christ in places like China, Iraq, and Iran God will win the victory, and their faithfulness to the very end of life's race will be rewarded with citizenship in the New Heaven and on the New Earth. While they do battle with fear and doubt, and the very real struggle of holding on to their faith in the face of modern day persecution God has prepared a place for them with no more mourning, or sadness; with no more tears. For this, God's love should be celebrated.

The challenge for us in this morning's passage is to remain faithful to God in the midst of our ease. It is easy to be a Christian in the United States. For too many that ease has become a reason to take our faith for granted. We think, "I'll go to church when it is convenient," or, "I'll tithe when I have extra money," or, "I'll pray in public, but only when I'm with people from church." Sisters and brothers, if we cannot be faithful to God here and now, how are we going to live in God's presence in the New Heaven and the New Earth? As Methodists we are supposed to understand we have a calling to, "Flee the Wrath to Come," by running toward Jesus with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our might. Historically, Methodists all over the world have accepted this challenge by doing our best, "to Do No Harm, to Do Good, and to Stay in Love with God."<sup>2</sup> Please, be challenged by these three statements. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. Are we living into this challenge? Do we love God enough to work hard every day to obey these three simple rules? If not, what is getting in the way? What needs to be moved? God has already revealed to us through the Apostle John this world is going to pass away, and God is going to set all things right. Let's be ready when the time comes.

In Jesus' name, Amen

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<sup>2</sup> Reuben P. Job. *Three Simple Rules* (Abbingdon Press: Nashville 2009).