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The Glory Now Revealed: What We'll Discover About God in Heaven

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Revelation 21:1-5

## **BIG IDEA – AN ETERNAL EDUCATION IN THE GLORY OF GOD**

Good morning, Two Cities Church. It is a joy for me to be with you. I'd like to open our time in prayer, asking God's help.

Father, we thank you for the joy of assembling week by week with the people of God, and we thank you, O Lord, for the work you're doing around the world. We thank you for both the local church and the universal church, and we thank you that we can partner together to reach a city, like Two Cities is here, and we can also partner together to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now be with us as we meditate on heaven. Be with us now as we unfold Scripture and try to understand what that glorious future heavenly home will be like. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

### **01 HEAVEN...WE DON'T THINK ABOUT IT ENOUGH!**

I've been looking forward to doing this since Kyle asked me to come, and I am excited to be able to share with you some insights the Lord has given me on the topic of heaven. In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul says, "Set your hearts on things above and things to come."

In other words, the apostle Paul wants Christians to be filled with hope. We are commanded to hope, to be radiant in hope, to be buoyant in hope, to be clearly and obviously hope-filled people, especially in this present age, because we're surrounded, the Bible tells us, by people who are without hope and without God in the world.

As we Christians go through daily life filled with hope, and especially as we go through significant trials...medical trials, financial trials, just practical life trials, things that are going on in our lives...so clearly filled with hope, it may well be that some of those people who are around us who are lost, who don't know Christ, will ask us to give a reason for the hope that is so evidently in us.

So, we are commanded to be radiant with hope. Now what *is* that? What is hope? I believe *hope* is a feeling, a strong sense in the heart, that the future is bright based on the promises of God. Friends, I can tell you, our future is indescribably and infinitely bright.

Now, this morning, we're going to probe closer to the limits of what the Lord has revealed to us in Scripture about heaven than perhaps you've ever done before. I want a hope, as it says in Romans 5:5, that does not disappoint. I want a hope that's based on truth. I'm not into speculation about heaven.

I'm not against people sharing near-death experiences. I think that's fine, but I don't think it's much different than someone having a dream about heaven and then telling us what was in that dream. I don't think we should get out notebooks and write down detailed notes about what their dream was about.

I want to base my understanding about heaven on Scripture and sound reasoning from Scripture, and that's what we're going to do. The Lord revealed aspects of our future heavenly home to the apostle John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos, a little island off the coast of modern-day Turkey.

The Lord revealed to John a series of visions, first, of the glorified resurrected Christ, and then there was a door standing open in heaven, and he was invited through the Spirit to ascend through that door and to see the heavenly realms, a throne and someone seated on it. He was also invited, in a later vision, ahead in time to see what the new heaven and the new earth will be like.

Meditating on heaven based on Scripture, not just in the book of Revelation but throughout Scripture, is promised to be blessed. Revelation 1:3 says, "***Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.***" Isn't that exciting?

Very, very soon we're going to be in our heavenly home. The time is near. But the point in Revelation 1:3 is we are blessed by reading Scripture on this topic of heaven. Later, in Revelation 21, he has this incredible vision. Revelation 21:1-5:

***"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new***

***Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.***

***And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with [people], and he will live 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.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"***

What that means is what John wrote in the book of Revelation is a sound basis for our heavenly hope. It's not speculation. Now, before I go on into the details about heaven, I have to stop and say it's very clear (it's revealed throughout Scripture, but especially in Revelation 20-22) it is only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life who will enter the New Jerusalem.

It's only those who have genuinely come to personal faith in Christ, who have received forgiveness for their sins through repentance and faith in Christ, who will spend eternity in heaven. The question I want to ask is...*Is that you?* Have you trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior? If not, I want to urge you, before this day ends, to repent and trust in Christ and believe in him for the forgiveness of your sins.

Now, for all those of you who have come who are already Christians, I want to spend the time we have probing, scripturally, what heaven is all about. For a period of about five years, I meditated on the topic of heaven based on Scripture, and I had the opportunity to write a book called *The Glory Now Revealed*. The themes I uncovered through scriptural meditation were thrilling.

We can't begin to delve into all of those themes in depth. We have limited time. So, the image I have this morning as I stand before you is kind of like I'm a professional tour guide at the Smithsonian museum and you guys are all hundreds of my closest friends, and I'm spending an evening with you, giving you a personal tour of the Smithsonian.

Now, the Smithsonian is the largest museum in the world. It's actually 21 museums, 1.5 million square feet, with 157 million separate items on display. (By the way, I had to look all that up on the Internet. I didn't know any of that, but I knew it was big.) So, imagine that I'm giving you an evening, a special personal tour of the museum, and we're going to be walking through wings of the museum.

I'm going to turn on the lights, and they're going to go on about half a mile down that corridor. I'm going to tell you, "There are about 25,000 items down that corridor. Here are a few of what they are. Got it?" Then I'm going to frustrate you by turning off

the light and going to the next wing of the museum. We don't have time to delve into all of the things, and I think heaven is going to be infinitely more varied and infinitely more complex than that. We have a limited time, and that's what I want to do with you this morning.

## **02 CENTRAL IDEA: AN ETERNAL EDUCATION IN THE GLORY OF GOD**

Now, what is my idea about heaven? Foundationally, it is about this. I believe heaven will be an eternal education in the glory of God, resulting in energetic and eternal worship. God is going to reveal his glory to the redeemed. We're going to learn things about God we never knew, and we're going to respond in eternal worship.

Let me just stop and say this. Many Christians have a very tragic and limited view of heaven. Essentially, they think of heaven as boring, static, like nothing ever changes. We have an image of, like, you're going to be on a fluffy, white cloud, and you're going to be there with a golden harp, and you're going to be singing "Amazing Grace" forever.

"When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing ['Amazing Grace'] than when we first begun." People are like, "Is that it?" One woman said to me, when I was talking about the topic of heaven, "I don't know. I always figured I would die and go to heaven and be happy, and I didn't think much more about it."

Well, I think we can do much more than that. Let's dig in and find out how energetic and exciting heaven is going to be. I believe it's going to be all about discovery of the glory of God. Revelation 21 and 22 make it very plain that the new heaven and new earth and the New Jerusalem are radiant with the glory of God. It's all about the glory of God. Listen to these verses. Revelation 21:10-11:

***"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. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."***

It's glowing. It's radiant, shining with the glory of God. A few verses later, Revelation 21:23: ***"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."*** So, for the redeemed, heaven will be a dynamic place immersed in the glory of God. We're going to be learning aspects of the glory of God that we never knew in life, but they're going to be revealed to us in heaven, resulting in wave upon wave of worship for all eternity.

Now, what is the *glory of God*? We talk about this all the time, but what does it mean? I believe a good definition of the glory of God is the radiant display of the attributes or perfections of God. What are the *attributes*? Do you remember when God revealed himself to Moses on the mountain? Moses said, "Show me your glory," and God said, "The Lord, the Lord, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness." Those are attributes.

Throughout the Bible, God has given us... It would be impossible to give a physical description of God, because God doesn't have a physical existence. Instead, he has given us a verbal description just like that: "Gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness."

Theologians have gone through and have pulled out 25 or 26 attributes. They describe God. They answer the question...*What kind of God is he whom we worship?* The attributes are God's love, his knowledge, his wisdom, his power, justice, mercy, grace, patience, and many others. These things are going to be radiantly on display in heaven, and I believe it's the reason God originally created the universe to begin with.

I believe in eternity past. Actually, before there was anything at all, I believe there was the triune God...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God determined to create all things for the display and the enjoyment of his glory. God did it not out of emptiness or out of loneliness, for God was full within the Trinity, within the Godhead, but he wanted to share himself with us.

He's generous, and he created angels and people and then many other creatures as well, but we are special. Angels and humans are special in that we can understand and study and appreciate those attributes in ways that eagles and rivers and stars can't. So, we were created for that purpose. God created all of those things for a display of his glory.

Now, I believe when we're there in heaven we're going to be immersed in the glory of God constantly. Imagine in your mind that we're there. We're in the new heaven and new earth. We're in the New Jerusalem. We're in our resurrection bodies. This present evil age is done. No more death, mourning, crying, and pain. That's all done. We're there. I believe our experience of God will be in three senses: God's *past glories*, God's *present glories* in that beautiful world, and God's *future glories*.

God's *past glories* are all of God's actions, all of the things he has done over 6,000-plus years of redemptive history. God's *present glories* will be seeing his face; seeing his throne; seeing Christ; seeing the angels and the cherubim and seraphim, the living creatures; seeing the redeemed, a multitude greater than anyone could count from every tribe, language, people, and nation, radiantly beautiful, surrounding us; the new heaven, new earth, the New Jerusalem, and all of that.

We'll be able to explore the new earth. We'll be able to explore the New Jerusalem. We'll be able to see all that God has woven into his new creation and how beautiful that will be. The Bible says very little about God's *future glories* in heaven, but we'll be in resurrection bodies in a new heaven and new earth with plenty of things to do, and there will be an unfolding story and development in that world that we can be excited about.

Now, the sermon I want to preach today is mostly about God's past glories, when we get to that place. God is going to be teaching us what he did over 6,000 years. A key insight in my studies was this. Though we will be glorified in heaven...we'll be perfected...we will never be omniscient. What does that mean? Well, a pastor once said it this way: "Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?"

What does that mean? God has never had a new idea. Why? Because he's omniscient. He already knew it. By the way, I want you to know when you go to the Lord in prayer, and you're praying for your sick friend in a hospital, and you say, "Lord, I want you to know that my friend..." He already knew it. There's nothing you can ever teach God, nothing you can tell him he didn't know.

All right. Here's the question: Will things occur to us in heaven? The answer is "Oh, yeah, they will." Things we never thought about, things we never knew, will occur to us. That's what I mean by an education in the glory of God. There will be things God did in this present age that we never knew anything about. How many are there? There are literally more than we can count. It takes an infinite topic to fill up infinite time, and God is that infinite topic. We're going to be studying for all eternity the greatness and majesty of God.

### **03 BIBLICAL PROOF OF HEAVENLY MEMORIES**

Now, before I go on, I need to root what I'm asserting here in Scripture. That's my methodology. That's what I want to do. Can I prove from Scripture these things that I'm asserting? I think I can. I want to take you in your mind (you can just listen or go there in your Scripture) to Psalm 111:2-4.

I think Psalm 111:2-4, which I discovered well into my five years of meditating on heaven and studying about it... I said, "Now that captures the essence of what it is I'm trying to say in this book on heaven." Psalm 111:2-4. Listen to this. ***"Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful."***

It brings goose bumps even now. I've been over it again and again, but I just love that passage. Let's go back over it slowly. **"Great are the works of the LORD..."** The things God did. **"...studied by all who delight in them."** Studied means learning aspects of the greatness of the work of God. It results in delight on the part of the people of God. **"Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever."** That's heaven.

**"He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful."** So, putting it all together, Psalm 111:2-4 says the people of God will assemble together to celebrate the mighty works of God that he did throughout all of history. He will cause those works to be remembered and delighted in and studied forever. That's heaven.

Or Ephesians 2:6-7. Again, I'm trying to prove that when we get to heaven, we'll actually remember our earthly lives, the lives we lived in this present world of sorrow, sin, and pain, this present evil age. Yes, we will remember all of those things. Ephesians 2:6-7: **"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."**

Ephesians 2:7 says in the coming ages, in eternity future, God is going to show how much grace he gave us in Christ. All of us here, all of us Christians, underestimate the grace of God. We underestimate how much grace God showed us as sinners. We underestimate the provision that Christ made through his blood shed on the cross.

In heaven we'll have a more and more and more proper estimation of the grace of God, and not just for ourselves, personally, but we will be so expanded in ourselves to take in brothers and sisters, fulfilling the second great commandment. We will love our neighbor as ourselves. We'll be just as interested in how God showed grace to our brothers and sisters as how he showed grace to us. How awesome will it be, for eternity future, to study the grace of God? (Ephesians 2:7)

Or, again, the issue of rewards. We're going to talk later briefly about rewards. In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus said, **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

There, Jesus is promising rewards to people who are persecuted for the gospel, and he's saying those rewards will come in heaven, but there's no point in rewarding or celebrating some great thing that was done on earth if it's not remembered. Imagine

seeing someone walking down the road, and you find that they have an Olympic gold medal hanging around their neck.

You ask, "What did you get it for? Did you get it for rowing? Did you get it for powerlifting? Did you get it for basketball? What was the sport?" They say, "I actually bought it in a pawnshop." I mean, what would you think about somebody like that? It's like, "Take it off. You didn't earn it. There needs to be a backstory."

Same thing with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Right? It's for valor on the battlefield. It's not about the ribbon and the actual medal; it's about the valor the soldier showed. Without the story, there's no glory. Therefore, rewards are all about the past. They're all about what we did in this present age to serve Christ, so we *will* remember those works for all eternity.

What about Christ himself, his wounds, his works, and his words? Will we remember those in heaven? We will. We'll be celebrating what Jesus did in this present age for all eternity. For example, Revelation 5:6 says, ***"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne..."***

Jesus mystically retained, in some way, his wounds from the cross. Remember how Thomas said, "Unless I put my finger in the nail marks," and all that? He didn't need to do that, but he did it as emblems of his atonement so we could worship him and celebrate him for what he did on the cross. Therefore, in heaven, we will be able to look back and remember what Jesus did for us.

A few verses later, Revelation 5:9: ***"And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased [people] for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'"*** Friends, we're never going to get over that. We're going to be remembering for all eternity what Jesus did for us. We're going to remember the past, and we're going to celebrate.

Probably the simplest text to prove the point I'm trying to prove here, which is in heaven we'll remember the past, is Matthew 24:35. Jesus said, ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*** We're going to remember the words of Jesus for all eternity. This present age is going to go away. A new heaven and new earth are coming. We'll still remember Jesus' words. So, Jesus' wounds and works and words we're going to study and celebrate for all eternity. One of my favorites is in Revelation 7, starting in verse 9.

***"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding***

***palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"***

They're celebrating salvation, but where they came from is known...their ethnic background, their culture, their language. That story came with them. Even cooler, a couple of verses later in Revelation 7:13: ***"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?'"***

Let me ask you a question. How long do you think that story is going to take to tell? We have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of brothers and sisters from every era of church history, from every corner of the globe. How did Christ save them, and then how did Christ use them? How long will that story take? We're going to be studying that for all eternity, and that is glory to God. I believe the most glorious thing God has ever done is to save sinners like you and me by faith in the blood of Christ.

#### **04 RESURRECTED BODIES, MINDS, AND HEARTS**

All right. I believe I've proven from these various passages that we will remember the past when we get to heaven. Let's talk about what kinds of people we will be at that point. We're going to be glorified. We're going to be perfected human beings. We're going to be conformed absolutely to the image of Christ. We're going to be conformed to him in all respects, physically, mentally, emotionally, volitionally, and spiritually. In all respects we'll be conformed to Christ.

Let's start with the resurrection body, which is described in great detail in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. This is what Paul says. At the second coming of Christ, every believer will get a resurrection body. This is how it's described. ***"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."***

All right. Let's go back over that. The resurrection body will be imperishable. What does that mean? It cannot age. It cannot decay. It cannot die. Secondly, it will be glorious. It will be radiantly beautiful. Jesus said in Matthew 13:43, ***"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*** All of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, are going to be radiantly beautiful. You're going to shine like the sun. The resurrection body will be glorious.

Thirdly, it will be powerful. It is sown in weakness, but it is raised in power. It will be a powerful body. I don't think that means we're going to be like Marvel superheroes,

but I think what it does mean is we will at least (Isaiah 40:31) run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint. How about that? How about having limitless energy to do whatever God wants you to do in heaven?

Then, finally, it will be a spiritual body. Now what in the world does that mean? I don't know, but I think it's a perfect combination of the body and the spirit in one, a oneness between the body and the spirit, a spiritual body. Think about Jesus' resurrection body. Wasn't it just a little bit different? Didn't Jesus pass through the walls of the tomb long before the angel came to roll back the stone and let the women in and let Peter and John in to see it? Jesus had passed through that.

Then, later, he goes to the upper room. The disciples are there, and though the doors are locked for fear of the Jews, he comes and stands in their midst. So he's just passing through walls. Then, with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he breaks bread with them and suddenly disappears. He's gone. So, what is our resurrection body going to be like? I don't know, but it's going to be a spiritual body.

All right. That's us physically. What about us mentally? What about us in our minds and our souls? Well, I believe we'll have resurrected minds and hearts as well, and those minds and hearts will be eternally free from the evils that beset our minds and hearts now. We'll be done with idolatry. We'll be free from pride. We'll be free from weariness, boredom, dullness, and forgetfulness.

*Dullness* means "Wait a minute. I don't get it." Jesus, at one point, said to his disciples, "Are you so dull?" It means, "You don't get it, do you?" Or remember, he said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when they were like, "We can't make head or tail of what has happened. The women came and said the tomb was empty. We don't know what's going on..." Jesus said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

They were dull. They were slow on the uptake. They didn't get it. They were forgetful. They were idolatrous. We'll be done with all of that. Do you remember at the end of the time with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus patiently showed them everything that was written in the Scriptures about himself? Then he disappeared, as I said a moment ago.

They said, "Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened the Scriptures to us?" That's going to be us in heaven. Everything God will show us about his greatness, our hearts are going to be burning about it, and we're going to give him worship. That's what heaven will be all about.

Now, we're still going to have limits. We're not going to be gods and goddesses. I already said we're not going to be omniscient. We'll still have to learn. So, little by

little, we'll get a bigger and bigger sense of the majesty of God in redemptive history. How awesome will that be?

## **05 SEEING THE PAST...NOT MERELY HEARING ABOUT IT**

Now I want to tell you the most speculative part about my book, but I'm going to go ahead and share it with you. I believe God will have the ability not merely to *tell* us what he did but to *show* it to us. Why do I say that? Well, heaven is about seeing, not merely hearing. Right now is about hearing. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.

Now we see through a glass darkly; then we're going to see face-to-face. Now we know in part; then, in heaven, we will know fully even as we have been fully known. As a matter of fact, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, "***When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.***"

We're doing childish thinking about heaven right now. It's the best we can do. But in heaven we're going to see. We're going to see it all. It's about not merely hearing but seeing. So, if that's true and God *is* going to teach us the past, wouldn't it be awesome if he could actually show it to us in visionary time travel?

Now, I know you're about ready to freak out. "I thought this guy was good until this moment. Now we're into weirdness." You need to understand, in the past, the prophets were often transported in visions of the Spirit to see things in different places. Ezekiel 8:3 is a very good example. Let me read it. "***The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem...***"

He transported him there. What did he see there? Wickedness, corruption, the elders of Israel doing wicked things. It was an interactive vision. He was actually able to dig through a wall and see some secret, hidden things. How cool is that? But it was tragic because of the wickedness.

Probably more to *our* point is the way the Spirit transported the apostle John ahead in time to see the New Jerusalem. We already talked about that, but listen again. Revelation 21:9-10: "***One of the seven angels...said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' 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.***"

That's visionary time travel. So, please don't freak out at me. I'm saying that's what happened to John. Well, here's the thing. What did he see? He saw the New Jerusalem,

the bride. He saw the church. He saw the people of God, what Peter calls *living stones* built into, what Paul calls in Ephesians 2, a *spiritual temple assembled together to glorify God*.

Well, here's the thing. If the Spirit could transport the apostle John ahead in time to see what she will look like, imagine going back in time, once she's completed, to see how she was built. Every single living stone quarried from Satan's dark kingdom set into the spiritual wall of the temple. How awesome will that story be? It would be very cool to see, not merely hear, how that whole thing happened.

What does that mean? Well, if that actually happens, God could transport us to show us what the Red Sea crossing was like, to actually be there. Imagine being immersed, with the water walling up to the left and the right and the pillar of fire leading the Israelites through that dark night to the other side, with the Egyptians held at bay behind them and then destroyed. How awesome would that be, not just to hear it?

Paul said of his vision of heaven, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know." That's how real the vision is, how intense the vision is. Imagine that. It would be like movie night in the New Jerusalem every night, but a better movie than you ever saw, better than Sensurround and 3D and the goggles and glasses. None of that. Better than virtual reality...immersed, seeing.

Or with Elijah and the prophets of Baal when the fire fell down from heaven and consumed that sacrifice and all of the people of God fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God." Or church history. Not just Bible history but church history, seeing our brothers and sisters who stood firm for the gospel during the Roman persecutions, who wet the sands of the Colosseum with their blood and stood for the gospel so we, in subsequent eras, would have a pure gospel...to see that.

To see Polycarp burned at the stake after testifying so courageously and how God used his death. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church," Tertullian said. To see how God used those martyrs. How awesome would that be? I think it would be awesome to see all of those things and to have full immersion.

Billy Graham preached in Times Square, New York, in 1957. You should Google the image. It's amazing. He's there standing to tens of thousands in the city of New York, people out in the streets, and he's preaching the gospel. Or earlier, George Whitefield preaching to thousands during Colonial America...to see the results, to see people's tears coming down their faces, to see his courage. How awesome would that be, not merely hearing about it but experiencing it through vision.

In any case, even if God doesn't do that, he may do something even better than we could conceive. I'm just telling you it's not going to be boring. You're saying, "Well,

Pastor, you have a PhD in church history. Of course you like that. You like sitting and listening to lectures. We really don't." I get it, but I think God has the power to engage you in what he did in every generation.

## **06 REWARDS: UNEQUAL CAPACITIES FOR HEAVENLY GLORY**

Let's talk now briefly (I already mentioned it) about rewards. Let's talk about rewards, because I think this is vital in terms of my whole understanding of this heavenly topic. In Matthew 6:1-21, Jesus talks about rewards, and he's very zealous that we not lose our rewards.

***"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before [others], to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [...] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. [...]"***

***"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*** "And when you fast, don't tell everyone that you're fasting. Do it in secret so your Father will reward you." Then he summed it all up in Matthew 6:19-21.

***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

We are commanded to store up treasure in heaven, to store up rewards. And what is that? It's good works done for the glory of God by the power of the Spirit, done for the building of the kingdom of God. That's what the rewards are all about. Now, what are rewards? I'm going to give you three Cs that I think rewards are. They are *crowns*, *commendation*, and *capacity*.

*Crowns* are emblems of honor given by the hand of God to the people of God to elevate them and honor them. The 24 elders were sitting on thrones, and they had crowns. They were constantly falling down and casting their crowns before the throne of God. They were giving him full credit, but those crowns were theirs to cast. They were honors given for service. So, that's what crowns are. They're emblems of honor. Jesus said in John 12, ***"My Father will honor the one who serves me."*** How awesome is that.

Secondly, *commendation*. *Commendation* is praise from God. It is God praising you. I believe in heaven we will praise God. Of course we will. But God also will praise *us* in this well-known pattern. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master." That's commendation. That's God telling you, "I am pleased with what you did."

Now, I think we ought to store up as much of that as we possibly can get. We should live every moment of every day to please the Lord. He's a good, good Father, and he will tell his children he was pleased with them. And not just on judgment day. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Kind of like, at that moment, "I told you you're honored, and if anything ever changes, I'll let you know." No. It will be an eternal experience of the personal pleasure of God between you, as his adopted child, and him, as your heavenly Father. "I was pleased with that." We should live for that. We should live every moment for that and store up as much of that as we can.

Thirdly, *capacity*. This is the hardest of the three to understand, but it's incredibly important. In Genesis 15:1, God said to Abraham, "Fear not, Abraham. I am your very great reward." "I am what you get." We get God in heaven. The fact of the matter is God is infinite. We will have varying capacities to take the glory of God in. We're not all equally going to have that heavenly experience.

I believe we will have differing abilities to immerse ourselves in the glory of God. Picture, if you will, different-sized vessels, like a cup or a bucket or a vat or a water tower (like for a town) or a supertanker, all of them completely submerged in the Pacific Ocean, and there's a lot more ocean beside that. They're all 100 percent full, but they have differing capacities.

So we will be in heaven. How we live our lives now will affect how much of God's glory we'll experience in heaven. We will all be 100 percent satisfied, but we will not all have the equal heavenly experience. How do I know that? Well, one verse in particular, Luke 6:38. Jesus said, "***Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.***"

The size of spiritual generosity you use here and now to the poor and needy, in evangelism, in various service to the church, or whatever... The measure you use is the measure you will get back to you. When? Jesus said another place it's at the resurrection of the righteous. So, that's what rewards are all about.

## 07 GOD'S SOVEREIGN WEAVING OF THE TAPESTRY OF HISTORY

Now, concerning God's sovereign weaving together of history... That's so big I can barely even begin to talk about it. History is complex. In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter said, "***With the Lord a day is like a thousand years...***" Let me ask you a question. What do you think God did yesterday, a 24-hour period? What did he do Saturday? You're like, "I don't know." Just keep it simple. He did a lot.

Well, he did a lot every day. God cooked a glorious meal every day. He's not going to rake it off into the trash. He's going to serve it to us, but we blew by it in our lives on earth. We didn't have the capacity. Jesus said, "I have much to say to you, more than you can now bear." In heaven, he's going to circle back and say, "Let me show you what I did that day."

Estimates say about 7,000-plus people come to faith in Christ every day. I don't know how they know that. I have no idea, but that's a lot of people. Imagine all the heavenly celebration that happened yesterday at all of those people who crossed over from death to life. Imagine being able to study all of that. We're going to study how God wove all of history together.

## 08 OBSCURE PEOPLE AND EVENTS FINALLY REVEALED

I'm skipping a lot of things here, but let me share with you probably one of the most encouraging parts. We know about the great names of history...Calvin, Luther, Jim and Elisabeth Elliot...all of these great heroes. We're going to know them, and we're going to study their lives. But God delights in obscure people.

Do you know the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles are nothing but, for the most part, genealogies? I once went through and counted 911 names. We know nothing else about 90 percent of them except their name and what tribe they were in. Why does God do that? Because he wants to tell people like you and me, obscure people, that he knows us and is aware of our lives and he never forgets.

Today, we celebrated parents. They brought in their little children. I think one of the greatest roles there is in redemptive history is that of a Christian mother who poured the gospel into her children from infancy. It says in 2 Timothy 3, "***...how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures...***" They're not famous, but I think it is the most strategic category of service there has been in 20 centuries of redemptive history.

So, we're going to celebrate the works of women, the works of parents, the works of obscure brothers and sisters who went to parts of the world we didn't even know they went to. There's nothing recorded about what they did. Their lives were over

like a mist, a vapor. It was done. But in heaven, we'll be able to find out how God used those brothers and sisters, those obscure people, and how he built the kingdom using them.

## **09 APPLICATION: OVERFLOW WITH HOPE; STORE UP TREASURE!**

Well, there are so many other things I could talk about. I didn't even mention demons and angels and being able to study how God protected you and sent angels and you entertained angels without knowing it (in heaven you'll find out), and how much God put a hedge of protection around you and would not let the demons get at you at a time of weakness and how God protected you and sustained you. We'll study all of those things.

So, how can we put all of these things into practice? Well, first and foremost, I began by talking about hope. Meditation on heaven is about building hope in Christians. Romans 15:13 says, ***"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*** I want you to do that. I want you, as Colossians 3:1-4 says, to set your hearts on things above and things to come.

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be (and should be) also." Fill your heart with heavenly meditation so you can then be an overflowing fountain of hope to the people around you. Christian people around you will come and drink from you. Non-Christian people will come and ask you to give a reason for the hope you have. Fill yourselves with that.

Secondly, store up treasure. Look again at Matthew 6:19-21. ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."*** "Well, how should I live my life, Jesus? What should I do?" Every day, store up treasure in heaven. Do the good works God has prepared for you to do. He has gone ahead of you (Ephesians 2:10) and prepared good works every day. He will never forget anything you've ever done.

So, store up treasure by those good works, by secret prayer that no one ever knew about, by putting sin to death by the power of the Spirit, by raising your families in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, by boldly sharing the gospel with your boss or with a coworker, by going on a mission trip. Store up treasure in heaven.

It's not some guilty pleasure to think about treasure in heaven. You should be motivated by it, because what is it? It is God being pleased with you, pleased with how you lived your day today. Let us close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for these heavenly meditations we've had today. There are so many more things we could talk about. I pray that you would take these biblical truths we've learned that heaven is all about the glory of God and a full immersion in the glory of God and learning aspects of the glory of God we never knew...

O God, I pray, help us to meditate on these things and be immersed in them and be glowing, radiant with hope, even if we get a cancer diagnosis, even if we are going through physical trials or financial trials, that non-Christians, who are without hope and without God in the world, can see and ask us about Jesus, who died and rose again, and they might find eternal life in him. In his name we pray, amen.