

## SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## REVELATION 21:1-5 (KJV)

## HEAVEN! DO YOU GET THE PICTURE ?

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

*And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

Imagine that you and I lived 500 years ago at the time of Martin Luther or Christopher Columbus. What if I were trying to explain to you how a computer types out documents. I suppose first I would have to get across the concept of a basic typewriter, which was not invented yet. I would explain that it's a machine with keys that control "forms" of letters so as to strike a page and leave an imprint. I would say the letters on the typewriter are like the wooden blocks of type found at the printer's shop. The blocks are inserted into the printing press in the proper order, so that when the surface is inked, and the letters pressed onto the paper, an image of the letters is left behind. I really don't know how I would go on to explain the modern keypad, screen, computer, and printer. At any rate, my point is that to explain something unfamiliar, often one has to start with something familiar.

Revelation, is a lot like that. Revelation was written by the Apostle John—the John of Peter, James, and John. He is the same apostle who wrote the Gospel of John. Likely you know by heart *John 3:16*, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" John, in his old age, was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching Christ in the Roman empire. There, God gave John great visions of the future of God's people—the Book of Revelation. God's people would be beset by Satan from top to bottom, as was true for all history. Satan would marshal all his forces against them, the beast of ungodly government, the beast of the lying false prophet within the church, all the demons, etc. It surely seems that the people of God would be devoured. But John also saw how the Lord protects His people who trust in His Son for forgiveness and salvation. Satan will fall—he and all of His forces cast into the lake of burning sulfur!—hell.

Revelation uses picture language to describe this future victory of the Lord over Satan. It is difficult for physical human beings to grasp spiritual concepts--the power, cunning, and vileness of Satan's evil spirit-world, as well as the even greater power, wisdom, love, and majesty of the Triune God with His victory over Satan bringing about our eternal rescue in heaven. The word "eternal"--no end—makes no sense. John was given visions of spiritual concepts presented in physical terms—locusts, horses, war, the prince, God's throne, throngs of thousands dressed in white. The visions are many and varied, striking and fearful; yet comforting for the Child of God in Christ.

When Christ returns, it will be the Last Day, the End. He will not come before the Last Day setting up a 1000 year kingdom on earth, as some misunderstand Revelation 20 to say (the millennium). Jesus told Pontius Pilate "*My Kingdom is not of this world*" (*John 18:36*). When Christ returns on the Last Day, the Great Resurrection of all the dead will take place. "*The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil [despised the Son for forgiveness], to the resurrection of condemnation*" *John 5:28-29*. All the dead will be raised up, and all people will be judged. The raised-up believers, followed by the yet-living believers, will be taken to the bliss of heaven. The unbelievers, having despised salvation in Christ, are cast into the eternal fires of hell along with Satan and all evil forces.

Our text is from chapter 21; there is only one more chapter. As all the visions draw to a close, John sees a beautiful picture of the ultimate victory and peace for God's people—heaven! *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.* A new heavens and a new earth, meaning the destruction of the world as we know it. The very heavens and the earth that God created in the beginning, will be destroyed. Peter tells us, "*The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*" (*II Peter 3:10*). Total destruction is coming.

But do not fear. For the child of God in Christ, there's no fear, only joy! *I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* The eternal Kingdom of God is pictured as a great and glorious city. Put aside all negative connotations of city life (which ranchers and farmers would have). Rather think of a great community of very close brothers and sisters living together in God's love and security. Furthermore, the city is decked out like a bride on her wedding day. The Bible calls those who trust Jesus' life and death for forgiveness and salvation, the bride of Christ! "*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).*" Imagine how immaculately prepared the bride of an earthly ruling monarch would be! This is the Bride of Christ! And this is you. This is all Christians. He loves you dearly. You are His bride. He died and rose for you—to make you spotless!

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.* Another picture. A "tabernacle" is really a tent-like structure. Here it says the "tent" of God comes to be with us. God comes to make His residence with men. In the glory of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, God "tents" with us! Imagine that God brings His tent to your front yard to live with you. A landowner comes to live in love next to his workers. A past-or-present President of the U.S. sets up housekeeping right next to you—your friend, your advisor, your confidant, your caregiver, your encourager, and in this case your Savior. It is true, we go to live with God, as Jesus said, *In My Father's house are many mansions [staying places]. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:2-3). We go to live with God, but here heaven is pictured in warmest of terms, that our God and Savior comes to live with us.

Sometimes to describe something unknown, it's easier and more effective to tell what it is not. Producing a document on the computer is not like arranging blocks of individual letters in proper sequence in the old printing press, then changing them all around for the next page. It does not mean taking out all the blocks and re-inserting them in order to make a change or correction.

So here. John tells us what heaven will not have. *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.* Picture the Lord with love and tenderness, coming to your side, sitting down to comfort and encourage you, to dry your tears, saying, "There, there. It will be all right. Whatever frightens you, whatever pains you, whatever loss, whatever sadness, whatever guilt is bringing tears to your eyes, in love for you I have taken care of it. My Son, who loves you dearly, has paid your penalty for you, even for the foolish things—sins indeed which make Me very angry—but I am at peace and forgive because of what My Son has done for you. There, there. It's all right." And your foes? Those who oppress you and make you cry, even Satan himself who lays trap after trap for you, are done for, defeated, gone. *God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.*

*No more death. No more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain.* No more dealing with Death, the end of earthly days that is drawing ever closer. You feel the aches, pains, ailments. Friends and loved ones leave you, as they pass on. It's coming for you too. But NO MORE DEATH. Just the opposite-- ETERNAL LIFE—life without end. Our logic only thinks in terms of beginning and end. But not so with God. . Can you identify with death and pain? It doesn't take being over 60. The pain from too much sun, the pain from too much fun, the pain from the simple flu or the super flu. The pain of hurt feelings, the pain of knowing you have hurt someone else. All pain all gone. *The former things are passed away.* The life of this valley of tears has gone and past. Sin ingrown into our hearts already at birth and in that of others, is gone and past. The sinful world with all pitfalls is gone and past. Satan himself, gone and past from being able to afflict you. He is confined to the lake of fire.

*And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.* All things "new!" All things fresh, and right, never to go sour again. An existence of perfect peace and joy with the Father, the Savior, and the Holy Counselor forever. And an existence of peace and joy with your brothers and sisters in Christ—where everyone is on the same page, where no one misunderstands each other, no one even unintentionally hurts one another. Too good to be true.

But it's true! The text ends, *He said unto me, Write! for these words are true and faithful.* God's says it's True. On this last Sunday of the Church Year know again that sinners, that you, have forgiveness, resurrection, and the bliss of heaven awaiting you in Jesus forever. **Heaven! Do you get the picture?**

So be it. Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---