

The City of God

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[0 : 00] Father, it's a lot easier for us to imagine a really bad future than it is for us to imagine something like heaven. And it's far easier for us, Father, to long for idols masquerading as heaven, to long for utopias that we human beings will make or create by our own power.

Father, it's far easier for us to imagine that than it is for us to imagine heaven. It's hard for us, Father, even to hear what your word has to say about it.

So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do a mighty work in our minds and hearts and wills, in our imagination and in our memories. We ask, Father, that you would make our minds and hearts and wills, our imaginations and our memories, that you would make it good soil so that your word will enter in to our mind and our heart and our will, our imagination, our memories, our longings and our yearnings, that your word will enter into us as good soil and that we will bear much fruit for your glory.

That, Father, we will have a great desire to see you face to face and to stand in your presence.

Father, fan and flame within us such a desire, such a longing and a yearning.

And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Just apologize in advance for my coughing.

[1 : 35] On one hand, I just rejoice to see all the leaves coming out in the trees. On the other hand, I also have allergies and asthma. And so it just, I forgot to take my antihistamine this morning, so I'm coughing a little bit from allergies.

It always means that spring is a little bit bittersweet for me, since it brings both allergies and, I mean, who wouldn't want the weather? Allergies are worth it to have the weather.

Probably in our culture, I think even amongst young people, John Lennon's song, Imagine, is very well known. It begins, imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try.

No hell below us, above us only sky. And then it goes on and says, you know, maybe one day you'll join us and then the world will be as one. And I'm not going to take any cheap shots at John Lennon and his song.

But I am just going to comment that I think he's wrong. I actually think that it's actually very hard to imagine heaven. Sorry, what's that?

[2 : 43] Yeah, I mean, I think it's very easy to imagine that there's no heaven. That's not actually very hard. I think it's the easiest thing in the world to imagine there's no heaven. I think it's hard at all.

It's very easy. What's actually hard is to imagine heaven. It's a well-known problem in drama and in novels and in theater that it's far harder to portray a good character than it is to portray a bad character.

In Milton's classic Paradise Lost, the best parts of that poem are where he's describing the devil and hell. And the weakest part is where he's trying to describe heaven.

And so, in fact, I think it's very easy to imagine there's no heaven. But it's very hard to get our minds around heaven.

And so, if you find your mind starting to drift this morning, one of the things you can pray is that the words here in the Bible, which are describing something which ultimately words can't really describe, and my attempt to bring this word home to you, that somehow or another the Holy Spirit will move and work in minds and hearts and wills in a way, that bring these words home to your imagination, your heart, and your mind, and your will.

[4 : 03] Because I think the words that are described here in Revelation chapter 21 and 22 are hard for us to imagine. And it's easy for our minds to drift.

So, please pray as I go through it. If you find your mind start to wander, say, oh, yeah, that George said that when that happens, I'm supposed to pray. And then we'll all get something out of this very, very beautiful and very powerful passage of scripture.

And now, before we sort of look at what it says about heaven, to bring out a bit of a contrast, I'm going to try to tell you two jokes. I'm actually going to tell you two jokes. The question will be whether anybody laughs.

I tried it with my family, and these jokes flew like a lead balloon. All of my kids and my wife just looked at me blankly after I told the first one.

And because I'm a dad, not to be deterred, I told the second one. And that also flew like a lead balloon. So, we'll see if this works for any of you. Okay? So, here's the joke, the first joke.

[5 : 07] And by the way, just in advance, I invented the second joke myself. I adapted the first joke into a second joke. And so, the first one I heard from another place, and the second one I developed.

So, the Hindu comes, a Hindu is visiting Ottawa, and they come to one of those hot dog vendors that you see downtown in nice weather, sometimes in bad weather as well. And she asks, do you have vegetarian hot dogs?

And the vendor says, yes, I do. And he said, you want one? And she says, yes. He says, what do you want on it? And she says, make me one with everything. The Hindu, make me one with everything.

You see, if you have to explain it, you have to explain it, it's not a joke, right? The Hindu, make me one with everything. I thought it was real. I thought that was so funny when I read it.

So, here's the second one. And she has a Buddhist friend. And so, the Buddhist friend says, I'd also like a hot dog. And the vendor says, what would you like on it?

[6 : 10] And she says, make me one with nothing. I invented that one myself. So, if you tell it to somebody else, you have to give me credit for it.

Either that or blame, okay? If they don't laugh, you can say, that's my pastor. He's so lame when it comes to jokes. Anyway, that's the Hindu, make me one with everything. And for Buddhists, make me one with nothing.

And so, the Bible is going to portray a very, very different end than Hinduism or Buddhism. And a very, very different end than Hollywood portrays. And that common human religion portrays.

And it's found in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. And today, we're just looking at Revelation 21. So, if you turn in your Bibles with me, we're going to look at this chapter. And I can't figure out a good hot dog joke description of what the Christian belief is.

Maybe one of you during the sermon, by the end of it, will have a hot dog joke for Christians. I couldn't figure one out. But as you already know, I'm not very good at figuring out jokes. So, here's what it says.

[7 : 13] What is it that the Christians understand about the end of all things? And here's how it begins. Verse 1 of chapter 21. Then I saw a new heaven. Oh, we're in trouble. I didn't set my stopwatch.

That means I have an extra 10 minutes to preach. No, just joking. So, verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Just sort of pause there. We're going to actually spend a bit of time on this verse. It's not saying that there's not going to be any surfing in heaven. It's not saying that all of us who want to move to places, all those people who go to Florida in the winter and be by the ocean, that's actually not preparing yourself for heaven at all.

What it is, if you read all the way through the book of Revelation, I haven't commented on it. I don't think I've commented on it once. But every time that the sea is mentioned in the book of Revelation, the sea is a symbol.

And it's a symbol of evil. And so this is just a continuation of the imagery. If you take a concordance and you look at it and you look at when the sea is mentioned, it's always mentioned in connection with the devil.

[8 : 23] So it's not being literal here. It's just a continuation of the imagery. And so what it's trying to say, verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. It means that there's no evil whatsoever, no source of evil, that all you have is the new heaven and the new earth with no evil whatsoever.

And here's the first point. The first point is, I will have a resurrection body. And I just realized after I sent it to Andrew and before I could text him again, we should get rid of the word to and put in the word and.

And then the sentence actually makes sense, which is a good thing for a sentence to do to make sense. I will have a resurrection body and dwell in the new heaven and earth that God will make. I will have a resurrection body and dwell in the new heaven and earth that God will make. That's what the Bible teaches, that God's desire for every human being that was born, we won't all get there.

[9 : 27] Talk about that in a few moments. But that's what God's desire is. He is going to make a new heaven and a new earth. And he will give his people, he will transform us so that we can live in that new heaven and that new earth.

You know, it's very funny. I've been waiting several weeks to say this because I realized it several weeks ago. And so now it's my chance. You know, when I said that, you know, the Hindu hot dog person says, make me one with everything and the Buddhist make me one with nothing. In both of those systems of thought, basically the end of all things is one version of what Christians believe hell is.

Isn't that sort of shocking? Because in Christian circles, in Orthodox Christian circles, there's a bit of a debate as to whether after, in a sense, God punishes us in hell, that eventually there's an annihilation that we no longer exist.

And other Christians believe that there's not an annihilation. And I'm not going to comment on it in the sermons. That would be a whole, that would be one of those things we'd have to have sort of a couple of Bible studies at.

[10 : 41] There's a whole range of texts and complicated things to sort out. But here's the thing. If that annihilation view of hell is correct, then that annihilation, which Christians understand as hell, that's exactly what Hindus and Buddhists seek as heaven.

Because to be one with everything is to completely and utterly lose yourself. You cease existing, right? Because the famous analogy is it's like a drop of water joining the sea.

And once you put a drop of water into the sea, the drop of water disappears. It no longer exists. It's just the sea. It's just the ocean. And, you know, so this has to mean that if, in fact, for a Buddhist and a Hindu, what they long and yearn for is annihilation.

And if the Bible is inviting us not to long for annihilation but to flee annihilation, and instead to understand that God is going to make a new heaven and earth.

It's not that he's just going to make a new earth. It's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. And that he will make us so that we can dwell there at home. Dwell in earth and heaven.

[12 : 06] That's a radically, radically different vision of what's going to happen. It's the end of the big picture of the Christian story. So, in a sense, chapter 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible, they're the true counterpoint to the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

And, in fact, even in a few moments when we're going to talk about some of the things that God's going to do in the new heaven and the new earth, it'd be very interesting for you later on to go back and read Genesis 3 where evil comes into the world, and you see what happens as evil comes into the world, pain and tears and sorrow and all of that.

And then you see what's going to happen in the new heaven and the new earth. It's a specific reversal or overcoming of the fall. And in the big picture of the Christian story, God makes everything good. God creates everything, and he makes it good.

And he makes human beings to have a pivotal, central role in the created order. That human beings, in a sense, are the priests of the created order. That they alone are made, we alone are made in the image of God, the likeness of God.

That we, in a sense, are to give voice and a specific type of intimate, personal relationship with God on behalf of the entire created order. And that Adam and Eve, who have this, in a sense, representative role for all human beings who since existed, that they chose not to be those priests and to be in union with God and communion with God and fellowship with God, and they chose to be like God themselves.

[13 : 35] They chose to dethrone God in the attempt to be God themselves. So the big Christian story is that it begins with creation, which is good. It moves to the fall, which means that now human beings and all human reality is slightly bent.

That it's no longer the way it was intended to be. That there's now evil in the world. That there's now pain in the world. That there's now death in the world. And it all comes as a result of Adam and Eve and their decision to try to be like God's themselves.

And then all of what we know as the Old Testament. Genesis chapter 4, right to the end of Malachi. That is the period of promise. It is the period of God revealing to people what he is going to do to rectify the situation.

It's God making clear to people that they can't rectify it themselves. To make it clear just how far they've been bent away from God. And a promise that God is going to send to deliver.

And then we have in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John, we have God keeping his promise. We go from creation to fall to the promises to God keeping his promise in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who the Bible describes as a second Adam.

[14 : 48] And Jesus lives amongst us, suffering the trials and temptations that we suffer only without sin. But he does all that he experiences these trials and temptations without sinning.

But that isn't what we need. We ultimately need this sacrifice that only God can make, where evil is dealt with, and rebellion is dealt with, and the punishment is dealt with, and the banishment and destruction, and all of the consequences of evil, and all of the things that God should really do to make things right, so that he's both just, and because he's good and loving and merciful, Jesus takes our place.

He takes the place. What would unmake us if God did it to us, Jesus comes and stands in our place, so that what would unmake us falls on him and unmakes him.

And in that coming and dying upon the cross, he trades his place for mine. That's what we receive when we put our faith and trust in Jesus. Not only him standing in our stead, but him offering us his place instead.

And the big picture of the Christian story is God creates all things good. Evil comes into the world through human actions. God then speaks to us as human beings and starts making promises about how he's going to put all things right, because only God can put all things right.

[16 : 04] And the Gospels are the story of how God comes to put all things right, and then the rest of the New Testament up until Revelation chapter 21 and 22. I'm simplifying things just slightly.

That's the period of the already not yet.

That's what we live in right now. The already not yet. On one hand, as I read in 1 Peter, I'm a sojourner. My true home is in heaven. But I live here right now.

I have the Holy Spirit within me when I put my faith and trust in Jesus as a type of first fruits. But I still, that God hasn't created the new heaven and the new earth yet.

So we have creation. We have fall. We have the promises. We have God keeping his promise. We have the already not yet. And then at one point in time, which is still in the future for us, what's described in Revelation chapter 21 and 22, we have God making a new heaven and a new earth, the end of the story, which is the beginning of the real story.

It's the end of this story. And God makes all things new. He makes a new heaven and a new earth. And for those who are the followers of Jesus, the adopted children of God by grace, the true story, the long story, the unending story where every day is better than the one before is just the beginning.

[17 : 23] And in that story, I will have a resurrection body and dwell in the new heaven and earth that God will make.

Now, you know, if you have a story, if you understand that the end of all things is annihilation, then why should you care for this creation right now? If at the end of all things is going to be annihilation, why should you care for other people who will only be annihilated if they end up managing their karma, they will only end up being annihilated?

Why care for things? Now, I'm not saying that there's no caring for things in cultures dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism. I would say it's because we're ultimately made in the image of God and there's this, in a sense, residual memory in each person that, in fact, that there's this different story which we were made for, that creation isn't a prison for our souls or our spirits, that the created order is not a prison.

The created order is not a punishment for us. There is, on one hand, the story of Hinduism and Buddhism is that the created order is a type of punishment for us, but there's this part of us that knows that that's not true.

And so you see tended gardens and you see good things that happen. But for us as Christians, this idea that God created us to have bodies and to be in a relationship with him and that when the story is all over that there will be new heaven and a new earth, then of course we should care for people.

[18 : 58] And of course we should care for this created order. And you and I might know that we'll never make this world perfect. In fact, if there's one thing that comes from this story is that the modern habit of organizing ethics and right and wrong around some type of utopian future, and that's a very, very powerful, you know, just the whole, anytime somebody says that something's progressive, it means that they believe there's some type of utopian future that human beings are going to make that we're moving forward towards.

And Christians are to rid utopia from their minds completely and utterly. It's one of the most important things for discipleship today and to form a Christian mind today is to completely and utterly rid our mind of any form of man-made, woman-made, human-made utopia.

Because we understand that God is going to do this. But it doesn't mean that we don't care for things. We care for things even more because creation matters to God.

It was made by God and the end of all things will not be annihilation, but it will be a new heaven and a new earth that God makes and that God's adopted children by grace will dwell in forever.

I can't get my glasses back on. I was at a... It's funny. One of the things that can unite some churches is what they say that's wrong.

[20 : 26] I was at a United Church funeral a few years ago and the minister said that the person who had died had become an angel. It was just about a year after I'd been at a Roman Catholic church and the priest said that the person who had died had become an angel.

And it's very, very common to hear people talk. It's a bit surprising to hear a minister or a priest say that a person who dies has become an angel, but it's a very common type of idea.

And so if we do try to imagine heaven, it's trying to imagine what it's like to be an angel, a disembodied spirit with wings, well, without wings, but a disembodied spirit.

And on the other hand, many of us, when we try to imagine heaven, we sort of are greatly influenced by Hollywood. One of my favorite movies is Gladiator. I know that it's almost completely and utterly wrong about everything that it says about the Roman world, but apart from that, it's a very, very compelling movie as long as you don't think you've learned anything at all about Rome from watching the movie.

Just remember that. I learned nothing about Rome from this movie. It's a good movie. And of course, at the end of that movie, it's not a spoiler alert, you know, you see the fellow and it's of course in a, the fields look beautiful and the light filter is very nice and it's a, and there's a bit of a wind and everything is blowing and he gets reunited with his wife and his son, the hero of the movie and that's heaven.

[22 : 05] And so, most of us in Canada, when we do try to imagine heaven, what we imagine is either becoming like spirits or we imagine some type of future like that without God present.

But we see that the Bible is asking us to imagine something which is very, very, very, very different. Like already, this is quite different than how most people try to envision heaven, but, but, but the next part is even more stunningly different.

Verses two and three. Actually, we'll start at verse one again. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. Verse two, and I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

Notice that again. Remember I said we had to rid our minds of all sense of utopia that human beings are going to be able to try to create some type of perfect society. Heaven here, verse two, I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

[23 : 22] Here's the thing. I'm going to word it in these ways. If you could put it up on the screen. I will live, here's, here's what heaven is. Here's what you can pray you have a longing for. And I put it in terms of I so that if you write it down in your notes, it's not we, it's not you, it's not they, it's I.

I will live in the city where I am a neighbor, where I have a neighbor, and where everyone has God as their neighbor. That's heaven.

That's heaven. The city. Now next week we're going to look at the second image. A few weeks ago I talked about the image of the bride and the feast.

And next Sunday we'll look at Revelation 22 which has the image of the Garden of Eden. A Garden of Eden. It's an image of a garden. But for now all of chapter 21 in fact what's going to happen is that there's going to be a few more talk a little bit about what it's like to be in that city and verses 9 to the end of the chapter is just a description of the city.

And I'm not going to go through and well maybe I will read it in a moment but here's the fundamental image. This is a spectacular, spectacularly important image. Right? So if the modern Canadian type of image is that somehow or another when you die you become an angel well if you're going to become an angel when you die why should you really care about what goes on in the city?

[24 : 45] Why should you care about what goes on in the world? If you're just going to become an angel when you die like why should you care about your neighbors? And if all that happens is when you die you go to be with the people whom you like hopefully they've picked you to be in heaven with them by the way.

That's an intellectual problem that people have never talked about. You know? What if it happens that you die and it's like going to a party where everybody when they talk to you they're looking for somebody better to talk to?

We wouldn't think that was heaven would we? I hate going to a party where I know nobody I get stuck with somebody and I can tell they think they're stuck with me and they don't want to talk to me even for an instant because their eyes are going like this all over the room hoping they say oh there's Fred good to see you Bill they say to me because they don't even remember my name and you know so people never think that you know when we die we go to be with our loved ones and they don't realize that their loved ones are hoping we won't be with them when they die okay that's a maybe we should send some letters to the National Post to the Ottawa Citizen to ask them to try to reflect on that problem in terms of the modern Canadian view of heaven so but you know what so if the modern view of heaven is either angels or we're just going to be with people we like why should we bother with neighbors why should we bother with the city but heaven is pictured as the city this is really important for modern Canadians and modern North Americans because so many Christians flee to the suburbs with the hope that they don't really have to be part of the city so many church slides in worship services are pictures of nature as if real living is getting away from people and real living is getting away from the city but in the book of Revelation when it pictures the new heaven and the new earth and it pictures where I'm going to dwell with my resurrected body it pictures a city and it pictures a city where I have neighbors and it pictures a city where I can't move into a neighborhood without having God as my neighbor everybody who lives there has a neighbor and everybody has one of their neighbors is God and we dwell there with God as our God and we enjoy it

I mean I don't even have to can you see this is revolutionary in terms of how we should view our city not that Ottawa is heaven far from it but the city matters to God cities matter to God and you know to understand that in heaven I'm going to have neighbors and I'm going to be a neighbor like all this week and it sort of struck me I was trying to think how to put down this you know God will dwell with us and all that and it struck me neighbors I mean I think I'm an alright neighbor I live in the suburbs because that's where I can afford to own a house and I live in one of those suburbs where you hardly know your neighbors you know and but this means that I mean this means on a city level that we should have a heart for our city which is part of our vision statement and it's an important thing for us to figure out how to be great neighbors on one level it's training for heaven and even apart from this level of what it means for the city it's part of the reason why normal

[28 : 29] Christian life once we give our lives to Jesus there should be a drive that we have within us to connect with other Christians and to grow with other Christians and to meet with Jesus in the presence of his people and that that should be a drive of us that's why we have small groups that's why we have prayer meetings that's why we have ministries and that's why it's appropriate for us to try to figure out ways to connect because it's all connected to this in a small way with this image of heaven as a city where I will be a neighbor and I will have a neighbor I will have neighbors that's probably what I should say I will have neighbors and where everyone has God as their neighbor

that's what the book of Revelation is teaching us I'll say a few more things about how's my time we have time let's look at some of the ways just briefly how the city is described you jump down to verse 9 then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me saying come

I will show you the bride the wife of the lamb and I talked about this image of the bride of Christ it's a corporate image it's a lot of us as Christians when we think of our relationship with Jesus it's a private relationship but the image here of heaven is a corporate relationship and it's to try to bring home to us that there's this corporate sense and it's really important if I sing to Jesus as if he's sort of my boyfriend that's like a weird thing for a guy to sing about Jesus you're my boyfriend that's weird okay but if we're to understand ourselves that I'm part of as together all who are part of Jesus that we're the bride of Christ that's this corporate image which it's calling us to it's why at different times I've described that we enter the Jesus way one by one because I can't God doesn't have grandchildren right we all individually have to make a decision for Jesus we enter the Jesus way one by one but we walk the

Jesus way with Jesus and others and that's what the Christian faith is we enter it one by one but we walk the Jesus way with Jesus and with others anyway we talked about the bride a few weeks ago verse 10 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 a most rare jewel and then it describes the different gates in the apostles and it's really showing here how there's two testaments but one Bible two testaments but one Bible and God only has one people and up until the time of Jesus the primary way to describe the people of God was the nation of Israel and now it's those who are in Jesus which both includes Israel and those who are from pagan backgrounds like myself down to verse 15 the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and its walls the city lies four square its length the same as its width and he measured the city with his rod 12,000 stadia its length and width and height are equal and just what 12,000 stadia was the length of the

Roman Empire that's what 12,000 stadia was the length of the Roman Empire give or take a few stadia and so this city is the length of the Roman Empire at the time John was writing and its depth is bigger than the Roman Empire because the Roman Empire was wider than it was long and its height is the height of the Roman Empire he's imagining the cube and it's really hard for us it's hard for even ministers like me I mean on one level it's probably easier for me to use images to talk to you folks from the walking dead than it is from the book of Leviticus I'm not trying to insult you but probably most of us have spent more time watching the walking dead over the last couple of years than we have studying the book of Leviticus if not the walking dead some other type of thing from television but basically what John is describing here what the angel is describing here is a perfect cube and in the covenant was and where the

Jewish people understood God to dwell was a perfect cube and so it's describing here even the things of the crystals and everything like that it's describing that in a sense the city which is now as big as wide as the Roman Empire and the same height as it is and depth it's describing the holy of holies and that's where we live in the holy of the jewels and the walls they all exist to show the glory and the light and the movement and to magnify the glory of God and that is where you and I will dwell with a resurrected body I actually watch The Walking Dead which is a bit of a stretch for me because I don't like scary movies which is why other than sort of like The Walking Dead and the occasional zombie thing which

[33 : 53] I don't really find that scary by the way I don't know why I have to show all the blood spritting out but maybe it's because when I was a kid I had two things two very clear memories of things that terrified me when I was a child I know the original Wizard of Oz movie you know that old one yeah yeah I that up I had nightmares for weeks I remember at the time I think I screamed when the flying monkey show up in the Wizard of Oz I look at it now and I think gosh is that cheesy and corny looking but as a kid watching it I had nightmares for weeks and in the Christmas carol the old one you know with Alistair Sims and I had nightmares for weeks after I watched that as a kid with my parents and I remember just seeing the dark terrified of the ghosts but the book of Revelation the book of

Revelation is a little bit like a Christmas carol it's even though he's telling us all about heaven and everything like that there's going to be an opportunity for us to repent and sort of a little bit like you know the story of the Christmas carol is that after he's had the dreams he wakes up and he

discovers that they were just dreams and that Christmas is just happening right now and he has a chance for new life and repentance and that's what the whole book of Revelation is like that even this chapter and next there's going to be an opportunity for us to realize that it hasn't happened yet and we can heed the warnings and believe the promises and that God can do a new thing in our lives but let's go back to the verse four he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away and he who was seated on the throne said behold

I am making all things new also he said write this down for these words are trustworthy and true and he said to me it is done I am the alpha and the cowardly the faithless the detestable as for murderers the sexually immoral sorcerers idolaters and all liars their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death if you're a guest here I talked about the lake of fire last week I'm not going to talk about it again you can go back and listen to it online here's the first thing the first thing is that God takes a scattered incomplete finite fallen slave and makes me fit to dwell with him that God takes a scattered incomplete finite fallen slave and makes me fit to dwell with him you see the

Bible portrays that any type of rebellion against God rather than us actually becoming like God in our rebellion all we do is become slaves of different things we become slaves of lies we become slaves of idols we become slaves of and idols are things which we serve love obey trust and hope in so if we if we're serving loving obeying trusting hoping in money in a sense we become a slave to money money starts to run us we want more and more and when we don't and then when something frustrates us in our desire to get money we become angry and we become depressed and we don't even realize that we're now serving it we serve sex we serve lies we serve ideologies we serve all sorts of things and by serving them we become slaves and the picture of heaven here that we see is us in our resurrected bodies God takes me and I'm scattered because my betrayal of what

I am there that's not completely accurate I mean what's many of our thought lives like like many of our thought lives are like maybe I'm just vastly more sinful than all of you but what goes on in our thought lives sometimes we just think gosh I wish I could get revenge on that person and sometimes we think of kindness sometimes we want to imagine that we're the superstar and other times we want to just be the quiet servant sometimes we imagine that everybody is praising us and sometimes we just want to think of some way that we can give to another person and praise them and that inside of us on one hand there's parts of our life that are in deep slavery but on the other hand we know that there's some areas of freedom in our lives and that we're scattered we're incomplete we're finite and we're fallen which means that we can't be related to God in our own effort or power but fundamentally what we are is in bondage and Jesus comes to deliver us from bondage and partly what happens as God's word works its way in our heart as the Holy Spirit moves and works within us as we're gripped by the gospel and learning to live for his glory that what

[39 : 21] God brings into our lives is freedom freedom to love freedom to give freedom to forgive freedom not to be bound and that tiny bit of freedom that we start to experience as the Holy Spirit works in our lives as we're gripped by the gospel will describe what we become in its fullness when we die that when we die God does something in us that's only the tiniest little seed on this side of the grave but after the grave when Jesus welcomes us in his arms we will experience for all eternity in its fullness no longer a slave but free no longer scattered but whole no longer incomplete but complete still finite but fine with being finite because we rest in the everlasting arms of God no longer fallen and bent but made straight for all eternity and only

God can make me fit to dwell with him but the text then gives us this choice put up the next slide and here's the choice it takes courage to say no to lies and death and evil and idols and to say yes to Jesus choose courage like if there was to be a sentence to summarize that you know if you go back and read things about how to preach they often say you should have a sentence which gives unity to the whole sermon often doesn't show up in the sermon text itself but it sort helps you to govern your point I'm going to tell you what mine was mine would have been this no heaven is real if I want to organize all of Revelation chapter 21 in one sentence and usually it's about something being true and something that you have to do and this is how it is no heaven is real therefore choose courageous faith in Jesus no heaven is real therefore choose courageous faith in

Jesus no heaven is real therefore choose courageous faith in Jesus and the text here when it says about the cowardly the faithless the detestable is for murderers it realizes that on this side of the grave it takes courage to say no to lies it takes courage to say no to death it takes courage to say no to evil it takes courage to say no to idols and the Bible doesn't teach us the Bible isn't a faith of no no no no no it's always a no so we can say yes and the yes is to Jesus and the text here when it says in verse 8 but as for the cowardly it's in a sense introduction to the whole thing to recognize that it takes courage it takes courage to live a sexually chaste life life in our day and age it's mocked right it takes courage to practice forgiveness it takes courage to practice financial generosity and time it takes courage that even though maybe everybody in the party is all very very interested in this person who's involved in magic and it takes courage to say that that's not what you're involved in that you think that it's wrong it takes courage in

Canada when abortion is just assumed to be the way that Canada should be organized it takes courage to say no to that it takes courage when all of the best minds in our culture are saying that there should be a way for people to take their own lives and have doctors be able to kill people it takes courage to say no to that it takes courage to say no to lies and death and evil and idols and to say yes to Jesus and the purpose of Revelation 21 is choose courage choose courage Karl Barth famously said that courage is fear that has said its prayers courage is fear that has said its prayers some of us might not feel very courageous some of us just might know all sorts of fears that's fine say your prayers ask for courage God will give you courage know that heaven is real therefore choose courageous faith in

Jesus let's stand moon father father we ask you would gently 19 pour out your holy spirit upon us this morning you know father how much we let Hollywood shape or other sources shape the way that we understand what like after we die.

[44 : 43] We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do a work of healing and cleansing and restoration and renewal in our minds so that your word will form how we think about what happens after we die.

And we ask, Father, that you so fill us with the knowledge of the reality of heaven that we might have greater courage to live for you in our city, to pray and to work for the flourishing of our city, to pray for the ways that our city could at least in some tiny minute way model the heavenly city, that we could work for our city in such a way that the stench of Babylon be lessened, all the while knowing, Father, that one day that we are made for that heavenly city where we will have neighbors, where you will be our neighbor, where we will have resurrected bodies.

Father, fan in the flame within us such a longing and yearning. Help us, Father, to know that heaven is real and to choose to have a courageous faith in Jesus as we live each day.

And all this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen.