

"The Heavenly Jerusalem is Your Real Home!"

What is real and what is merely passing? The Bible often points out that what we are experiencing right now is only temporary. An American by the name of Arthur Reed was profiled in the media since he had reached the age of 123. The facts about his life were astounding. He married for the third time when he was 92, took 5-mile walks when he was 100 and rode a bicycle until he was 110. He worked until the age of 116. When he was asked the secret of his long life he replied, "They made me of good dirt!" No matter how good the "dirt" we are made of however, each of us – even 123-year-old Arthur Reed – is here but a short time and God's stern words are fulfilled: "Dust you are and to dust you will return." This morning God has in mind how you see your life. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians apply very well to the Christian: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

Today we join the disciple John in taking a look at the vision of God's people, his Church – in heavenly glory. God has revealed this to us as he did to John. Without him, we would not see what God has given and will give. Such is the tone which our text sets – an angel had to take John "away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high and showed him the Holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

But since we are still here on the "other side" of heaven, God presents pictures like this in order that we better see and live life the way God sees it and would have us live it – here and in eternity. We thank him for revealing this to us. He comes to us through his Word and realigns our vision which can get out of focus. Things on this earth start to seem all too real and heaven, at times, seems all too far away.

The heavenly Jerusalem is our Real Home. God here pictures the Church as a glorious city. Through God's Word we know this. Did you notice that the foundations of the city John describes were 12 in number? John says that on the foundations "Were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb." The 12 apostles represent the very real voice of God, the voices of God which picture life the way it really is and will be. God still speaks to us through their inspired writing. Through his Word we discover how people become members of this heavenly Jerusalem.

The apostles are "apostles of the Lamb." This is because in that Word we find out again and again about the Lamb through whom we become citizens of our real home, the heavenly Jerusalem. It is this life-giving Lamb whom Peter wrote about in his first epistle: "You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you.... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God."

This Lamb has won for us our Real Home, and a real, eternal life with God. Note the beauty of life with God as John tries to describe it: "Its brilliance was like that of a precious jewel." To make sure we understand that all those loved by God through the Lamb will have this real home, John uses the number 12 which also designates the Church in all its completeness. Jerusalem had a great, high wall with 12 gates, with 12 angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Its completeness is perfect: there were 3 gates on each side. The high walls indicate that this life includes all who belong and excludes all who don't belong. It's only because of Christ's work that we are saved and only through faith in his work that we are saved.

Our real home – the new Jerusalem – is God's revealed gift to us, revealed through his Word. God gives us the only life that is eternal and it is only the Lord who can bring us to heavenly perfection. Your life is not real or secure because you have worked hard and saved. Your life is not real or secure because you have been living in the same house for the last 50 years – Jerusalem is your real home. Even if you live to be 123 years old, that does not constitute a real life in the sight of God. Nor is life real because you like your work and how you live. Life in the end is not about how much you have done. What we have and what we have done we must someday leave behind.

What have you done? What legacy will you leave? When you depart what will be the story of your life? John and Charles Wesley are famous for influencing religious thinking but if it hadn't been for the perspective of their Christian mother their influence would probably not be well known. Susannah Wesley spent an hour each day praying for her 17 children. She took each child aside for a full hour each week to discuss and teach the Bible. This was a woman who was looking at life from a different point of view – she had the perspective of a heavenly Jerusalem!

In our text John sees "no temple in the city," but the situation is far different than a town without a single church. The holy city which God builds has no need of a church. John tells us that it will be that way because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of the Lord God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp.

This is the real life the way God intended it to be. John writes of a time when you won't need churches because the Lord is right there among his people. God's light cannot be put out. The "Lamb" is its lamp! The fact that Jesus rose from the dead and gave evidence that he defeated the Devil assures us that this vision is no flashing fancy or slight-of-hand. This Jerusalem is our Real Home.

What will you one day leave behind? What story will your life have told? Have you, my friend, wandered far from home – far from where your real home is? Are you living as though this place were your real home? Life with both its joys and worries too often clouds our view of our real home and takes away the joy of living. How much we're like the little girl who was afraid of the dark who was told by her mother: "God is with you." And the daughter replied: "But I need somebody with skin on!" The immediate crisis gets too big a piece of our attention and we lose sight of our Real Home.

We also can become too comfortable with life that seems to be comfortable and reality for us is not reality as God sees it. Worldly success does not equate with heavenly reality. In fact, you can sacrifice a real life with God on the altar labeled job security or financial security. John never writes about that as real or lasting. A funeral director maintains that familiarity with death improves one's ability to look at life the right way. He maintains: "There is nothing like the sight of a dead human body to assist the living in separating the good days from the bad ones!"

What story will your life tell? How do you see these few years we've been given? What legacy will you leave behind? Jerusalem is your real home! Does God instead seem like a distant vision? Out of touch with reality? Note something that might seem very obvious: Life gets out of focus and one loses touch with reality when the Lord is not permitted to be a major part of life here! Set your sights on heaven and let your life show that you're living for what is to come – the heavenly Jerusalem! To help keep her focus on the right things, I heard of a woman who kept a "heaven file." The file contained obituaries and articles of departed Christian family members and friends. It was a way that this woman found to be helpful in focusing on the life to come. You would also find a "heaven file" to be useful – here's one of the pictures from God's

heaven file in our text and it's for your eternal benefit to look more often through this file at those pictures.

If life as John paints it does seem to be a bit too good to be true or real, then look at the painting a little bit more! It could just be that those pictures of our Real Home as given by God in his Word are worth a bit more of your time and attention. And though we see it from a distance, may we always live our lives on this earth with the prayerful spirit of the hymnist who wrote: "Jesus, in mercy, bring us to that dear land of rest."

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