

A few years ago, I took 12 teenagers to an international youth rally in Knoxville, Tennessee. One of the special activities that we had scheduled during the rally was a white water raft trip on the Ocoee River. The Ocoee River was the location for the 1996 summer Olympic Whitewater games. One of the best rivers in the United States to do whitewater rafting. I was assigned with a guide and 4 other teens to a particular raft. We were going to travel down the Upper Ocoee. What a rush. Fantastic blue sky day. Clear fresh water. Bopping up and down. Waves hitting you in the face. It doesn't get any better than that. But after the trip, we had to get back into our van, head back to Knoxville, where we went to dorm rooms, with uncomfortable beds, and kids that just didn't want to quiet down until 2:00 in the morning. Wouldn't it be nice if we could have a whitewater raft trip, a beach vacation, where you never had to go back to the troubles of everyday life, and just feel awesome 24-7. Never bored. Or unhappy.

Well there is such a location. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Paul called it a house not made with hands. The disciples longed to go there, having heard what Jesus had said about it. John on the Greek island of Patmos, had the glorious privilege of looking into heaven. God showed him the things prepared there for His children, and John tried to describe these things in the book of Revelation. If you are like me, this is the place where you want to go after you leave planet earth. So, put on your swim suit now and join me as we find ourselves: "Wading in the River Of Life."

When you go on vacation today, don't you usually like to go someplace where the place has a view of something that takes your breath away. Well, that's the first thing that comes to mind with heaven. It is a place of beauty. Our God as we know even made this earth a place of beauty. Look at the great beaches in Florida. Siesta Key, Sanibel Island, Anna Marie Island. Or what about those great sunsets in Key West! What beauty. A little girl looked up at the stars one night and wisely said, "If it is this beautiful on this side, how much more beautiful it must be on the other side. Imagine a multitude of Christians standing before the throne of God and praising him. What a beautiful sight! Rev. 7:9-10 says, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count... 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."

Let's now take a closer look at heaven. Let's follow the angel on a guided tour. We read vs. 1-2. Not only is heaven a place of incomparable beauty, but it is also a place of endless life. And where does this everlasting life have its origin? IT has its origin as our text mentions from the throne of God and of the lamb. God gave man the original source of life at the time of creation while the Lamb gave us redeemed life after man fell into sin. In heaven though we observe that the water of life flows from both the throne of God and of the Lamb. Like a river which never runs dry so with water flowing from the throne in heaven. It is an unlimited supply of life. It won't run dry after we've been in heaven for 10 thousand years.

Further, our life in heaven will be crystal clear. In our hearts there will be love, forgiveness, and honesty. There will be no pushing and shoving matches to see who can speak or praise God first. There will be perfect harmony. Blacks, Mexicans, Whites and all other races will not be subjected to prejudice or name calling.

How will we stay alive in heaven? Will there be cherry and apple harvests in heaven? Our text talks about being nourished by fruit.

We have to remember that the book of revelation is a vision of John . In heaven the fruit that we will enjoy is the Word of God. What God speaks to us will always be interesting and spiritually nourishing. There will be no famines in heaven. In Rev. 7 we hear: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat." God's Word will then be our nourishment in heaven. God is not the type of speaker who makes you yawn after the first 2 minutes of his sermon. God's Word will be interesting and nourishing forever. It will be in season 12 months of the year. Eating the fruit is hearing the Word of God, rejoicing in it and believing it.

So how does a person get to heaven? There are two potential ways. Plan A is to earn it. That's the performance plan. To earn it you only have to never sin and always do what's right for your entire lifetime. Always make the right decision, always say the right thing, never the wrong thing, be perfect. It would be as if they changed the rules of the Baseball Hall of Fame and said in order to get in you had to bat 1000 and play error free ball your entire career. Sorry 300 hitters, you won't make it. Since none of us qualify for Plan A, God came up with Plan B. Plan B is Christ lives a perfect life for you, dies on a cross to pay for your sins, and then rises again to assure you the price has been paid. God the Holy Spirit leads you to believe that this is true and the only way back into God's family. As Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me." Sounds simple, Simply believe in Jesus as your Savior

To be happy always! To live forever! Can this really be true? All during the course of man's life he has been looking for ways to extend his life or keep that 17 year old youthful look. Ponce De Leon scurried the countryside of Florida for that Fountain of Youth, but came to the sad conclusion that it didn't exist.

In our present day as we look around we see many new medial drugs. But all the medicines in the world cannot halt the funeral procession of death. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death."

However, Jesus Christ offers us a life beyond this life. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me though he were dead, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin is the key which has opened the gates of heaven for our loved ones and for us. Rev 7 says of the Christians in heaven: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. As we get older we recognize more and more that life is filled with tribulations. I look around at the members of Open Bible and I marvel at the variety of tribulations we are facing. One of you has had both shoulders replaced. Another of you has 7 stents in your heart. Another of you has had a bout with cancer, and faced radiation and chemo treatments. Another of you has lost a child tragically some years ago. What is nice about what the Bible says, is that we have come out of these tribulations. In other words, we have been lifted away from their influence in our lives ever again.

Look too at our health situation for in heaven. It says the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations. No more influenza, cancer, brain surgery, strokes. Healthy again, both physically and spiritually. Handsome again, dark curly hair, a wonderful smile, a sharp dresser. Thanks to Jesus. It says in Isaiah 53:5 "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our

peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed.” Art is healthy again spiritually and physically.

Heaven is place of countless blessings. It is such a place because of the things that will not be there. There is much of it here. Pious job once said, A man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” Even Jesus was a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” But there will be no sorrow or sadness in heaven. There will be no pain in heaven, no long nights of suffering. A passage written in Revelation says, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” No more need for handkerchiefs, or kleenix boxes. No more tears spilling from our eyes.

The blessings of heaven continue. “We shall see his face! That is our Savior’s face. There are some people in the world we aren’t allowed to see when we want to. If you’d stroll up to the white house in Washington in January and demand to see President Trump, you’d probably get the shuffle treatment. You’d end of talking to one of his advisors or else it would take you days for an opportunity to meet him. Our president is an important man. But think how much more important Jesus is. There is no red tape when you want to see him in heaven. Jesus throws the doors of heaven wide open and says, “Come on in, see me face to face.” Bring your prayers to me. Hear my words firsthand. Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Heaven will then be a place of happy reunions. It won’t be like a mere earthly reunion. Oftentimes at family reunions, we miss someone who can’t make it for one reason or another. However, in heaven we will see our loved ones. Parents will meet their children. Sons will meet their fathers and mothers.

To understand in a small way the glories of heaven, I always tell people, you’re your best memories of this earth, and multiply them by a few million and you will begin to understand the joy of heaven. I remember sitting at a youth hostel, looking up the Jungfrau, Mench, and Eiger in Switzerland, while a student played a guitar and was singing. What a fantastic place that was. Or sitting on the top of a building in Heracleon Crete, watching the sun set on the Mediterranean. Fantastic memories. The joys of heaven will be much greater than these joys.

We cannot continue our guided tour of heaven without taking into consideration the final sentence of our text. “And they will reign forever and ever.” Satan has been busy in an effort to destroy the things of God. He managed to destroy the Garden of Eden. He tried to destroy Jesus by 3 temptations. But Satan, can never, I repeat never mar heaven. He and his cronies tried once and they got booted out. They can never return.

Forever also means that time cannot destroy heaven. Great cities such as the eternal city of Rome eventually fall away and all that is left is ruins. Niagara Falls is each year eroding farther away. But the New Jerusalem will never pass away. II Corinthians 5:1 says, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Charles Linbergh once said, “Take advantage of all that you are offered. Fame passes so quickly. Yes all things change and decay and fade away, but God and heaven never change. Something much better than a Caribbean vacation is coming. Look forward to “Wading in the River of life. Amen.