

## Advent Week 3: Heaven/Joy

READING: Revelation 21:22- 22:5 (Read Scripture Aloud)

*"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day- and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."*

### INTRODUCTION

Good morning, we're Travis and Michelle Kiers and we're excited to be lighting the third candle, Joy, and discussing the most fun of the four last things, Heaven. If the idea of the four last things sounds unfamiliar to you, or if you've missed the last two weeks, the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, are the traditional Advent sermon series of the Church, intended to help us prepare our hearts for Christ's coming.

What do you picture when you imagine Heaven? Some of us may still have traces of that old cartoony portrayal of heaven in our minds- Heaven made to seem monotonous and dull, an endless strumming of harps on a cloud, with no fun or adventure to be had, almost like having to sit quietly in class for all eternity. I wonder if that could have been the enemy's wiliness at work, making Paradise and life in the presence of God seem boring to children? C.S. Lewis- author, professor, apologist, and our teacher for today- disagrees. He declares that in Heaven, "The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy." The longings that we feel, for childhood, for beauty, that yearning for something *more*- all of these will find their fulfillment. This morning, we will be inviting God to renew our view of Heaven. It is easier to hope for something and work toward it when we have an idea of why it is desirable. A child might have a hard time enduring a long road trip to the mountains when they have never heard of snow, but imagine the difference when they know that snowball fights and snowmen and sledding await them. Let's begin.

### DEVOTIONAL

In "The Weight of Glory" Lewis writes regarding Heaven, "The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised:

1. that we shall be *with* Christ
2. that we shall be *like* Him;
3. with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have "glory",
4. that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and
5. that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe- ruling cities, judging angels,

ADVENT: THE LAST THINGS by Caitlyn Wymer

being pillars in God's temple."

It would be enough if we were given the first promise alone, that we shall be with Christ, always. As Augustine said, "He who has God has everything". But there is more! There is the promise that we shall be like Him. We will finally be the people that God had in mind when He made us: our true selves, sinless and redeemed, offered wholly, constantly, and joyfully to God. But what does it mean, that we shall have glory? Lewis suggests that our heavenly glory does mean in a sense, fame or good report, but not fame as we've seen it here on earth: fame conferred upon humans by other humans. He says,

"I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child- not in a conceited child, but in a good child- as its great and undisguised pleasure at being praised. Not only a child either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures- nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator... And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond all belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please."

Imagine standing before God and finding, astonishingly, that you have pleased Him with your humble workaday life- in the way you worked, parented, served, interceded, believed, forgave, reconciled, and loved. That you have become what Lewis called, "an ingredient in the divine happiness." You have received the commendation, "well done, good and faithful servant... come and enter your Master's happiness." (Matthew 25:21-23) You have been invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And lastly, we will rule with Christ. This is the fruit of the judgment we discussed last week. He will judge what we did in this life, and invite us to reign with Him, forever.

As we light the Joy candle, we remember the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 35:

*"But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; and everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."*

Come, Lord Jesus.

**LIGHTING OF THE HOPE, PEACE, & JOY CANDLE: Light the One Pink Candle and Two of The Purple Candles.**

Instead of ending with a question this week, we end with this reading from the Last Battle, C.S. Lewis' final words in the Chronicles of Narnia as the children enter Heaven. May it increase joy in us as we anticipate the arrival of that day:

"And as {Aslan} spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."