

Holy, Happy, Home.

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[0:00] Let me begin with a word of gratitude. It's a privilege and a pleasure to be with you. You've heard that I've come from Jackson, Mississippi, That we are one in him.

Tonight I want to talk to you about the theme of heaven. I think it's a theme we don't think about nearly enough, at least not one I think about nearly enough. Our fathers in the faith often exhorted believers to meditate often on heaven and its glorious realities.

And so David earlier read two passages in Revelation. I want to read a third from Revelation chapter 14. So if you have your Bibles, do turn there with me please.

Revelation 14. Normally I like to preach on just one text, but tonight we're going to jump around just a little bit. I hope you'll be able to still follow with me. I'll try and keep you on your toes and we'll be jumping from one text to the next, but I hope it will make sense and you'll be able to follow along as we go.

Before we read this passage, let me just quickly tell you where we're going to go. So here are the headings for tonight's message. Three interconnected ideas in these three interconnected texts.

[1:37] So we've already read Revelation 6, 9 through 11 and 7, 9 through 17. We're about to read chapter 14, 1 through 13.

And they together give us a picture. They give us a glimpse of the life of heaven. What will we do there? What will we be like there?

Or at least those who love and trust the Lord Jesus. What will we be like? What will life be like for us when we gather on that far shore? As we examine these three texts, we're going to summarize the teaching under three simple headings.

First of all, we'll think about righteousness. That is, we will be holy in heaven. We will be holy in heaven. Righteousness. Secondly, rejoicing.

We will be happy in heaven. Righteousness. We will be holy in heaven. Rejoicing. We will be happy in heaven. And finally, rest.

[2:41] We will be home in heaven. So, righteousness, holy in heaven. Rejoicing, happy in heaven. And rest.

We will be home in heaven. We're going to read now that third text in Revelation 14. Before we do, let me ask if you wouldn't mind bowing your heads with me as we pray together and ask for the Lord to help us as we open his word.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, as we meditate together now on your holy words, we've prayed that you would speak to us as we sang a few moments ago.

Now again, we beg you that by the same Spirit who inspired these holy words, you might give light to our understanding. That we may hear your voice.

and that you might incline our wills and awaken our affections so that we embrace the truth and receive and rest upon Christ alone as he's offered to us in the gospel.

[3:47] Work by your word and spirit in all our hearts now we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Revelation 14, verse 1.

This is God's word. Then I looked and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb. And with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads.

And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.

No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb. And in their mouth no lie was found for they are blameless. Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

[5:08] And he said with a loud voice, Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

Another angel, a second, followed saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion for sexual immorality. And another angel, a third, followed them saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath poured out full strength into the cup of his anger.

And he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. And they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image and whoever receives the mark of its name. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints and those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write this, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them. Amen. Amen.

[6:41] In the city where I serve, in Jackson, Mississippi, Reformed Theological Seminary has a campus not far from the church. And the former chancellor of the seminary is a member of our congregation, Dr. Rick Canada.

And he was preaching himself on heaven one week and afterwards he emailed me. I was preaching on heaven and he emailed me. He said in his email, When I was first at Reformed Theological Seminary, I always signed my letters and emails, Dr. Rick Canada, for a new reformation.

And then he said, I heard a professor at a different seminary talk about one of his students who was from Africa about the time when he preached his senior sermon, his graduate sermon toward the conclusion of his theological training.

The student told the assembled students and faculty that he wanted to preach on something that he had not heard preached about in the three years that he had studied in the United States, but something that was preached about almost every Sunday back home in Africa.

Heaven. He wanted to preach on heaven. The student suggested that perhaps we in the United States do not preach much about heaven, maybe this is true here too, because we have it so good and so easy.

[8:07] But they preach about heaven every Sunday back home in Africa, he said, because they have people in their churches dying almost weekly from AIDS or malnutrition or any number of other terrible circumstances.

Dr. Canada said in his email, after I heard that, I changed my signature and I've used this change now for over 20 years. He now writes at the end of his emails, Dr. Rick Canada, for a new reformation now and with the joyful hope of the new heavens and the new earth to come.

Now I think that African student was on to something, don't you agree? We live lives of relative comfort and ease and so we rarely think about the world to come.

We're too busy enjoying the world we now have. And when we do think about the world to come, if we're honest about it, it doesn't seem all that attractive a prospect to us, does it?

Truth be told, we'd rather prefer the abundance of our material prosperity here to the hard to picture raptures of a heavenly home hereafter.

[9:21] It all seems so very vague. That's why it's so important, I think, that we take time to bring the biblical teaching on the life of heaven into clearer focus.

Because I think it will, if we can really begin to grapple with it for ourselves, it will awaken in us a longing for the life to come. And that in turn will help us live like citizens of the world to come right here in the midst of a world that is passing away.

It will form in us a renewed resolve to prepare for the glory that awaits, even while we live here in this veil of tears.

It will weaken our addiction to the fleeting pleasures of this life. as we begin to see from the word of God how much sweeter the solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know in the world that waits for us.

Heavenly mindedness is the biblical antidote to worldliness. you might have heard the old expression somebody sort of tuts and rolls their head and says he's so heavenly minded he's no earthly use.

[10 : 46] Actually the Bible would say the only way to be any earthly use is to be truly heavenly minded. The only way to be earthly any earthly use is to be heavenly minded.

The scriptures command us to set our minds on things above and not on things on earth. So what can we say about the life of heaven?

Well the first thing about the life of heaven is that it will be a life of righteousness. We will be holy in heaven. If you look at Revelation chapter 6 with me notice in verse 11 the believing dead are given white robes to wear.

Likewise in chapter 7 at verse 9 the great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before those and before the Lamb are clothed in white robes.

Now look down at chapter 7 verse 13. Then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these clothed in white robes and from where have they come? I really like John's diplomatic answer don't you?

[12 : 15] Who are these clothed in white robes and from where have they come? I said to him sir you know this is your show you're the elder here this is elder's job to explain the word of God and disciple the flock of God you tell me and so the elder answers John who are these people in white robes?

He says these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation now let's pause there for a minute it's common today to view the great tribulation as a reference to some special period of intense suffering just before the final return of Jesus Christ at the very end of human history that is actually not at all John's understanding of that phrase back in chapter 1 of the book of Revelation at verse 9 John introduced himself to the readers of his book this way he said I John your brother and partner in the tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance that are in Jesus Christ and by the way those things always go together don't they?

the tribulation the kingdom and the patient and patient endurance for those who are in Christ Jesus tribulation comes but so does the kingdom the rule of Christ and patient endurance while we pass through these many trials to be in Jesus means to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and that kingdom comes into direct conflict with the kingdoms of the world therefore there is tribulation pressure suffering opposition and that's why citizens of the kingdom of heaven who live here in this world need patient endurance and did you see when in John's mind the tribulation begins is at some point distant from when he was already writing not at all he says I'm already living in it and so are you to the Christians in the first century already the great tribulation had begun the great tribulation in the

New Testament actually refers to the whole period between the first and final comings of Jesus Christ viewed from the vantage point of the suffering church that's what life is like it's tribulation it's trial it's difficulty it's hard and so when John sees here this vast multitude which no one can number from every tribe and people and language he's he's talking about the church he's talking about us the whole church having at last come through the sufferings and tribulations with patience patient endurance that are all part and parcel of what it means for us to be in Christ William Hendrickson the Bible commentator says quote the Dutch have a term for dying which literally means to get over or beyond suffering and that's the reality that John is seeing in this picture believers in Jesus have he's seeing believers in Jesus who've gotten over or beyond suffering past the tribulation of this life when you get to heaven at last that's what will have happened to you at long last you will have come out of the great tribulation that is life here and now as a disciple of

Jesus Christ but what about their white robes soldiers who come through a war zone do not sport pristine uniforms you might have seen pictures from the front line of the battle in Ukraine in the mud in the trenches they are not wearing their dress uniforms it is rough and dirty they have been in battle they have been in tribulation so how can these that John now sees who have come through tribulation have white robes well look at what the elder tells John again he says these are they coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood

of the lamb they are dressed in white robes because they have washed them and made them clean in the lamb's blood blood stains doesn't it if you ever get blood on a white t-shirt it is a nightmare to get a blood stain out isn't it blood stains it ruins clothes it doesn't make them clean but the blood of [17:17] Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world his blood Wesley sang his blood can make the foulest clean or another hymn we like to sing back in Jackson for nothing good have I whereby thy grace to claim I'll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary's lamb Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin had left a crimson stain but he washed it white as snow that is the song of every citizen of heaven they are robed in the righteousness of Christ clean and pure and holy and of course if we believe in Jesus Christ that is already true of us right now here today isn't it right now in the sight of

God before the bar of heaven's justice we are clean and righteous not in ourselves because of anything that we have done but despite ourselves despite all that we have done we are clothed in the righteousness of another in the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to our account God hides the stain of our sin under the clean white record of Jesus obedience and blood and yet we all know that underneath the white robes of our justification are being declared righteous we ourselves still remain dirty don't we our hearts still grimy with the filth of our continuing remaining sin but not so these residents of heaven no their white robes aren't hiding the filth of their hearts they are rather the outward expression of a thorough going reality that has consumed them at last as they come to stand before the throne of

God and of the Lamb having come out of the great tribulation they are clean all the way through that's why do you remember in Revelation 21 if you are to skip to the end of the book in the new Jerusalem John says nothing unclean will ever enter it nor anyone who is detestable or false but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life heaven will be as 2 Peter chapter 3 describes it the place where righteousness dwells I like the older version that calls it the home of righteousness every citizen who lives there will be perfectly comprehensively inside and out holy Hebrews 12:23 says that in heaven we come to the spirits of the righteous made perfect that's what John is seeing the righteous made perfect now that's not yet what we are is it we're not yet the righteous made perfect we might be legally forensically righteous justified in

Jesus Christ before the judgment of God his righteousness credited to our account but we're not yet made perfect in ourselves not yet God is working in us by his word and spirit changing us for sure mortifying killing our sin causing holiness Christ likeness to grow and ripen in our lives but it's a long slow hard process isn't it we are stubborn we're addicted to our sin and so our sanctification the process of becoming holy it remains incomplete imperfect in this life but in the minute we die when you close your eyes at last on this mortal world take your last breath here and then you open them on the lovely face of your savior all the remnants of your sin will be gone in an instant no hindrance to fellowship with the holy God anymore you will be holy like your savior his work in you will be finished at last and you will shine with his likeness often at funerals at the graveside

I'll read the words of the Westminster shorter catechism that asks what benefits do believers receive from Christ at their death the answer is that believers at their death do rest in the grave until the resurrection but their bodies being united to Christ their souls do pass immediately into glory and are made perfect in righteousness but their bodies being still united to Christ to rest in their graves until the resurrection so in the instant that you go to be with your savior in that instant his work is done and you become one of those in the vast company that John sees here dressed in white robes righteous and pure inside and out our sin in this life is like heavy iron shackles great chains constraining our wrists and our ankles think about

[23:33] Jacob Marley do you remember him in Dickens Christmas Carol he's bound and weighed down with these long heavy chains I wear the chain I forged in life he tells Ebenezer Scrooge I made it link by link yard by yard that's our sin all of us and we've had to haul it around with us wherever we've gone in life our sin and it's been a heavy burden sometimes hasn't it wearying weighing us down holding us back frustrating us we're not who we want to be yet but one day one day soon for a believer in Jesus Christ the shackles will be broken every link every weight will fall away never to hinder us again what a day it will be not another pang of conscience think about it never another moment's shame and never a moment's regret never a moment's guilt ever again all the weight of our wicked heart lifted entirely from our shoulders clean and pure and holy inside and out on that day the white robe of Christ's righteousness imputed to us reckoned to us already clothing us right here and now will be matched perfectly with a clean heart a pure soul the spirit of

Christ having finished his work in us at last what will heaven be like it will be a place of righteousness we will be holy in heaven don't you long to be holy not not ashamed anymore not guilty anymore no more accusations in your conscience nothing for the devil to put his finger on and say look at the mess that you have made free and clean holy in heaven and secondly heaven will be a place of rejoicing we will be happy in heaven in revelation 14 in the first three verses we read then I looked and behold on mount Zion stood the lamb and with him 144 thousand who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads and I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder the voice

I heard was like the sound of harpists playing their harps and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who'd be redeemed from the earth now again a bit like the great tribulation the 144,000 is another part of John's vision that's often misinterpreted by some Christians today to refer to a narrow specific number of individuals who will believe in Jesus right at the end of history again I think that is entirely misinterpreting John's message the number 144,000 is symbolic it's 12 times 12 times a thousand we might say it's 12 to the nth degree it is 12 to the max 12 of course being the number of the tribes of Israel and of the apostles of Christ so 12 times 12 times a thousand is just a symbol for the whole people of

God every one of them from every age and from every place who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ and notice what they've been gathered to do I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters like the sound of thunder its voice was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps and they're singing a new song they're praising God the volume the noise is so enormous John says it's like the storm surge pounding on the shore in a hurricane it's like Niagara Falls thundering like constant thunder breaking breaking directly over your head rattling the windows a vast untamed dramatic sound and yet John tells us immediately it's not an ominous or threatening sound it's not ugly it's not jarring it says it actually sounds like a single voice did you see that there's no cacophony there's only harmony

I heard a voice from heaven sounding like the thunder of many waters a single voice deepest unity in Romans 15 5 and 6 Paul prays that the Romans might have such harmony with one another that together they may with one voice in the Greek literally one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ here in the vision of John is that prayer John was praying for the Romans perfectly fulfilled and yet at the same time this deafening volume of sound this single voice that sounds as loud as a waterfall crashing on the rocks is beautiful it sounds he says like many harps all being played together at once it is a lovely complex compelling beautiful sound you remember the coronation of King

Charles and the music was extraordinary do you remember but the anthems of heaven in which every one of us will join will make that coronation look amateurish and our croaky old voices will sound like many harps in perfect harmony in beauty and glory and John says they're singing a new song see that language in verse 3 the phrase sing a new song occurs six times in the Old Testament often in conjunction with a command to play instruments sometimes summoning the whole creation to join the song and always in response to God's gracious invitation to salvation sing to him a new song play skillfully shout for joy psalm 33 verse 3 he put a new song in my mouth a hymn of praise to our

[30 : 59] God psalm 40 verse 3 sing a new song sing to the Lord sing a new song sing to the Lord all the earth psalm 96 verse 1 sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things psalm 98 verse 1 I will sing a new song to you oh God on the ten stringed lyre I will make music to you psalm 144 verse 9 sing to the Lord a new song his praise in the assembly of the saints psalm 149 verse 1 sing to the Lord a new song his praise from the ends of the earth Isaiah 42 10 the Bible commands us calls us all to sing a new song of course a new song isn't necessarily a song that was recently composed it doesn't mean a novel song as if the lyrics had to be brand new it is rather the song of newness the song that arises anew from a heart when the grace of

God takes hold and makes us new creatures in Christ and we're looking on as it were looking through the window into the scene here in Revelation 14 as all of those commands to sing a new song are perfectly fulfilled in that place where God makes everything new here are resurrected tongues singing a new song in a new creation and God says only the redeemed can sing that song only they have the capacity and the right and the title to sing that song every song they sing in heaven is part of that new song but in Revelation chapter 5 we get a glimpse of some of its content

they sang a new song saying worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you have ransomed people for

God from every tribe and language and people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth they're singing but you notice what they're singing about what is it that will fill your heart and your tongue with praise forever and ever that you'll never grow tired of celebrating it will be the Lord Jesus Christ his self giving love for you his work at Calvary for you Jesus is the one who takes the scroll and opens his seals this is a picture of God's unfolding plan Jesus brings the purposes of God to pass and his right to bring God's plan to fulfillment rests upon his atoning sacrifice for sinners worthy are you for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed the people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation we will all be gloriously happy in heaven but what will keep your heart beating with joy what will it be what's the reason for our happiness in heaven it won't be the stuff if there's stuff to enjoy it won't be the material of heaven it won't even be primarily the other people who will be with us in heaven it will be the sight of the nails in his hands and feet rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified as one old hymn writer puts it

John says that doesn't he then I looked and I saw a lamb standing in the midst of the throne as though it had been slain he sees the marks of the crucified Christ still in his glorified flesh these are the only wounds you know in heaven every other wound is healed but the marks of the nails in our saviour's hands and feet will shine as testimony to us of his love for us and they will make our hearts pulse with gratitude and gladness sometimes the thought of a perpetual worship service in heaven might fill us with some dismay perhaps because we're so impatient with worship here on earth but when you see the light of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ when you see the radiance of his majesty blazing from the nail pierced hands you won't be able to help yourself no one will say we're now going to sing the song will come unprompted from your heart there he is my saviour there are the nail marks right there that purchased me from sin and death and hell and brought me here you won't be able to help it your heart will overflow with gratitude and praise righteousness will be holy in heaven rejoicing we will be happy in heaven finally the life of heaven will be marked by rest we'll be home in heaven in revelation chapter 6 at verse 11 the souls of believers are under the altar and they're longing for the final day of justice and vindication that is yet to come they're given white robes to wear and did you notice they're told to rest a little longer so even now heaven before the new creation comes even now heaven is a place of rest for the souls of believers who have gone ahead before the great final day of resurrection rest from sin rest from sickness rest from suffering rest from sorrow a place of joy and rest and in revelation 14 13 that we read earlier john says i heard a voice from heaven saying write this blessed are the dead who die in the lord from now on blessed indeed says the spirit that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them spiritual warfare is over combat with remaining corruption in our own hearts over opposition and persecution over when paul says that he wants to depart to be at home with the lord which is far better this is what he has in mind i'll be home i'll be home you're most yourself when you're at home aren't you you're on your best behavior when you're in church i hope you're you're minding your p's and q's when you're visiting friends and family but you're you're most yourself when you're at home you don't put on airs at home you don't keep up appearances at home you you really relax at home in heaven

we will be forever truly completely at home paul talks about this doesn't he second Corinthians chapter 5 away from the body at home with the lord he will dwell with us and be our god and we will be his people he will wipe away every tear from our eyes death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore the former things will have passed away what is that it's a picture of rest at last rest perfect rest at home so righteousness will be holy in heaven no longer will you ever have a pang of conscience again the holiness of christ will shine out of you reflecting his majesty and beauty forever rejoicing we'll be happy in heaven you'll see him face to face and you won't be able to keep yourself from praising him and rest what a relief what a relief to be with [40:07] Jesus at last every barrier between us gone every sin that obscures his smile and hides it from our view here gone perfect peace forever how we ought to long for that day do you long for that day but brothers and sisters how should we live now while we wait for that day to come we ought to prepare here for life there those who are made perfectly righteous in heaven are those who've labored hard after holiness on earth those who rejoice in heaven are working hard on earth to fuel the flames of Godward joy praising their Savior on earth those who rest in heaven rest by faith on Jesus obedience and blood on earth and so here's the question we ought each to be asking

ourselves as we meditate on the world to come what is there of the life of the saints in heaven that can be seen in my

Christian life already here on earth holy and happy and at home with my Savior after his death it was said of the Puritan Richard Sibbes of this blessed man let this just praise be given heaven was in him before he was in heaven heaven was in him before he was in heaven those who belong there strive to live like it here how do you live how do you live do you live like a citizen of the kingdom of heaven would anyone looking at your life mark you as one who belongs there you know when I go back to the United States people know there immediately I was not born and brought up there

I bear the marks not just in my accent of having been raised here in Scotland brothers and sisters our citizenship is in heaven what are there of the marks of your heavenly home shining already from your life in the midst of this dark and cruel world is heaven in you before you are in heaven maybe actually you are not a citizen of heaven at all and all of this is just washing over you let me suggest to you that there is a better world as beautiful as the world is as you look out this window at least when the sun is shining as lovely as our world can be as rich and sweet as it can be it's also a dark place and a broken place and a cruel place a place of sorrow and loss and suffering and shame but there is another world a home of righteousness and of rest and of great joy

Jesus came to open the way to that world that anyone in this world might become a citizen of the world to come the path to entry comes at no price at all to you you pay nothing can you believe it the price of entry is zero for you because Jesus paid it all he's purchased the ticket he's opened the door and he invites you to come and join him in the life to come forever why wouldn't you want to go why would you be content with a world passing away when there's a world of righteousness and rejoicing and rest offered to you you take it by simply turning from your sin and yourself to Jesus Christ he bids you come and be welcome amen let's pray together Lord Jesus sometimes we can be very focused on today maybe tomorrow maybe a week from now maybe next year we've got plans maybe we're worried about what the days will bring we feel our own limitations and we ourselves can fill our whole horizons and we lose sight of your lovely face we forget your precious promises we stop longing for a world to come because we're fixated on the world that is here please will you forgive us help us Lord Jesus to look with renewed longing to cry with the apostle John even so come

[46:00] Lord Jesus bring your promises to pass in the meantime would you put the life of heaven in us before you bring us to live in heaven would you make us live like the citizens of heaven you've called us to be and for any here who do not yet know Jesus Christ who are not yet citizens of heaven oh God by your Holy Spirit Lord Jesus by your Holy Spirit take hold of their hearts show them the utter bankruptcy emptiness of a world that is passing away a life lived only for today and tomorrow when there's an eternity of rest and joy and purity with Jesus and all his people in a world to come on offer grant that you might draw them to yourself

Lord Jesus save sinners strengthen saints and bring honor and glory to your name for we ask it in your matchless name Amen