

Heaven: Where Jesus Reigns

Serving a King

Good morning, my name is Darrell Arnold, and I am the Director of Family Ministry here at First United Methodist Church – Bakersfield. That's a long title for a job that is about keeping the youth and children of the church out of trouble while also teaching them to follow Jesus. If you are visiting with us this morning, we are glad you are here in worship with us. Recently, in our church, we have been exploring the idea of Heaven and specifically what heaven is what it means for Christians, a people who have placed our trust in Jesus. Over the past three weeks, we had Pastor Richard and Andrew share three things about Heaven with us:

1. Heaven is the Christians eternal destination
2. Christians enter heaven through a relationship with Jesus Christ
3. Heaven is where Christians put our hope

As we close our series on heaven, I want you to know Heaven is complex, and it is, at times, a difficult subject to understand, but it is an important subject. It is a source of hope, a source of excitement, and it is an answer to the question of what could be.

The great preacher Martin Lloyd Jones had this to say about heaven,

“Everything will be glorified, even nature itself. And that seems to me to be the biblical teaching about the eternal state: that what we call heaven is life in this perfect world as God intended humanity to live it. When he put Adam in paradise at the beginning, Adam fell, and all fell with him, but men and women are meant to live in the body and will live in a glorified body in a glorified world, and God will be with them.”

I think this quote serves as a beautiful description of our main point today. We are going to be wrapping up our series by unpacking this statement, **“Heaven houses a holy king who wants a relationship with you.”**

Now, before we get too far into this, I must admit that growing up in America has left me with a bit of ignorance concerning the concept of a king. If my memory serves me correctly, the people of America have not been actively ruled by a king since July 4, 1776. For many of us, a king is not something that we have never experienced or even considered. The idea of being under the control of a single, all-powerful human ruler is something that most Americans bristle at or reject. We value our freedom. We appreciate having a political system where the people have a voice and control over who their leaders are. Rejection of a king and an all-powerful ruler is deeply engrained in the philosophy and core values of America; it is part of what makes us who we are. We have never bowed to a king, and if the people of our country have anything to say about, we probably never will.

The Human Conflict

Now take heart; this observation is not criticizing the American political system and saying that it is defective. This observation is bringing to light the ultimate temptation, a human desire for ultimate control. This reality shouldn't surprise us; this great temptation, this desire to control our destiny, is not new. From the very beginning of time, humans have sought control over their own life and existence. That's what got us into trouble in the first place; we were unable to trust the original plan of our eternal king. Genesis 3:1-6 states,

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

In our arrogance, humanity rejected the original plan God set forth. Being in an open relationship with the eternal king of the universe was not good enough. We could not trust him; we wanted to control our destiny. This crucial reality creates a tension that we have to answer: Have we changed? **Are we prepared to trust our life to an eternal King?** Are we willing to surrender control of our experience and allow someone to rule over us? Care for us? Love us? Because if we aren't, we will miss out on heaven and the most fulfilling relationship we could ever experience.

Invitations from the Throne Room

Our main text for today comes from the book of Revelation. Now for many of us, Revelation represents a bit of uncertainty; it is kind of like a crazy uncle at Thanksgiving. Your experience with him is sometimes outstanding, and other times, you are left scratching your head, thinking, "What in the world just happened?" With some proper insight and understanding, Revelation becomes a valuable tool in the journey to understand what awaits us in Heaven. Revelation is a unique type of biblical literature referred to as an apocalyptic prophecy, a for seeing of things to come. In a practical sense, it is a letter written by a guy named John to a group of churches in Asia Minor (Modern Day Turkey). John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples and a key leader for many of these churches. His letter is a product of a series of visions he had while imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. The main goals of his letter were to communicate what is to come and to offer hope to churches that were facing increasing persecution.

In chapter 4 of his letter, John is invited into Heaven's throne room by the king himself, Jesus. Verse 1 reveals to us both the invitation and the host, it states

“After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’”

John makes it clear in the first part of his letter that all of his visions come directly from Jesus and are for the benefit of his church. The main thing we should pull from this first phrase that our current life is not the end; we experience something after this. Heaven. **While this uncertainty about the “after” part can be unsettling, the main thing for us to pull from this is hope.** This scary, painful, broken world we live in is not the end something much better comes after. **King Jesus invites us to hope.**

Following his invitation, John is brought into non-other than Heaven's eternal throne room. John has an encounter with heavens eternal ruler: Jesus and describes the scene in detail. He starts with a series of precious stones that are meant to represent the magnificence of God's presence. They do not do justice to what John has seen, but it is the best John can do and something his recipients will understand. He then describes twenty-four worshipers who surround the eternal presence of God and what appear to be flashes of lightning and the rumbling of thunder. The twenty-four worshippers represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Disciples, representative of God's chosen people. In front of the throne rest seven lamps, and the ground is a sea of crystal clear glass. The description ends by revealing four heavenly creatures Centered before the throne of heaven. Revelation 4:7-8 offers a complete description of these creatures:

'the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"'

While it is easy for us to get lost in all the minute details John is sharing with us, the description is not the essential take away here. **The critical take away is that Heaven's throne and king are so great they are indescribable.** The best we can do is offer earthly symbols that come nowhere close to being accurate. The King of Heaven is higher than any being that has ever lived. His mere presence is beauty, power, and majesty all in one. John can only be present in this scene; he cannot speak or even move. Jesus does not ask him too. The only response to the king is to be present. **King Jesus invites us to be present.**

The closing of this passage reveals the ultimate truth. The one who sits on heavens' throne is eternal, and all his people submit to his will. Revelation 4:10-11 state,

“the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.’”

The opening portion of this vision closes with twenty-four elders, signifying God's people, bowing and offering a proclamation to God. The twenty-four elders ultimately surrender their own crowns to the throne of God and offer their witness of God's high power. They praise him, for he is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power because he has created all that exists. **The beauty of this final act is in the submission.** The people of God ultimately submit to God because they trust him and recognize his impact on our world. Once we realize the impact Jesus can have on our life, we only need to trust him, and we will experience his glory, honor, and power now and forever in heaven. **King Jesus invites us to trust.**

Will you accept it?

We have spent the last few minutes looking at three invitations that the king of heaven is offering you. Your relationship with him, your ability to come to him, your ability to be present with him, your ability to trust him do not magically come upon you when you get to heaven. No, you have to make a choice now. **This eternal king, the king from revelation, wants a relationship with you.** He created you, he has a purpose for you, and he wants nothing more than for you to say yes to eternal life with him. All you have to do is say yes, and you will live in his presence forever. Are you grieving the loss of someone close to you? Maybe a parent, spouse, or sibling? God wants to meet you in your grief, and he wants to comfort you now and forever. Are you looking at what's going on in the world and wondering if there is hope? All you hear is death and destruction, and you desperately need to know that something higher than all of that exists. God wants to meet you in your despair, and he wants to show you that hope can be found in him now and forever. Are you in the midst of a broken relationship? Maybe you have lost faith in a spouse, significant other, child, parent, or friend. God wants to meet you there, and he wants to show you and that you can trust him now and forever. No matter where you are in life this morning, know that there is hope. The king of heaven is inviting you to come to him, and he wants you to know that you can trust him. Why? Because he loves you. More than anything, he loves you. He loves you so much that he sacrificed for you. He took the thing that mattered most to him and sacrificed so that he could have a relationship with you, forever. His great love for you was not enough. A sacrifice had to be made to cover for your sin and brokenness. In his great love, he came and lived a perfect life and died for you. How you feel about yourself doesn't matter. How other people think of you doesn't matter. **Right now, The King of Heaven, King Jesus, is inviting you to have an eternal relationship with him.** Will you accept it?

The Kingdom Now

Church, God is inviting us to help establish his kingdom by sharing his message of hope, presence, and trust. He has commissioned us to take this message and move it beyond these walls. When was the last time you shared hope with someone? When was the last time you encouraged someone to be present with God? When was the last time you invited someone to trust God with their life?

Our king, our savior, our creator, our father, our God, is at work in the world among us. He is establishing his kingdom, and he is inviting people to a life filled with hope, to a life filled with his presence, and an experience built on a foundation of trust. Are we doing our part to join him in his work? Let's build his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.