

A Few Images from Revelation

Heard bits & pieces....

1. Reticence to talk about Heaven: embarrassed in scientific age to do so.

The great bugaboo, "Don't be so heavenly minded, no earthly good." Little danger of this...hardly mentioned at all.

Actually, my point would be that a fair amount of heavenly mindedness makes you more earthly good.

2. Balance

Phil. 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.....My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Yes, the Kingdom of God is already but still, it's not yet & we can allow its images to feed our Hope.

3. Be careful of taking the images too literally, remember they are "MORE THAN...."

Little boy & the ice cream question. If not there will be something so much more enthralling, that you'll never miss it.

Man who rather disgruntled told me that if he wasn't going to be married in the Kingdom of God, he didn't want to go there. . Thinking far too small, won't love wife less in Kingdom but more....will anything of value be lost....no of course not. But things that we value so much on this earth, may be forgotten in the splendor of that which is so much more enthralling.

Eye has not seen nor ear heard the wonders that God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Cor 2:9

John 3:12 Jesus (shaking his head) said to Nicodemus: If I have told you earthly things & not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly....

[I believe that we should use our imaginations to build anticipation for that which lies ahead with the recognition that all the glories that we can imagine, as glorious as they are, fall far short of the actuality. The Book of Revelation is full of images that can strain our credulity, but given thought open up to us avenues of delight and wonder that can stimulate our appreciation & even longing for the City of God. There will likely be colors that we have not seen and certainly music that we have not heard. For example, it's hard to think that Mozart will stop writing Music. It's difficult to believe God would say to him, I know how much you love the music & praise that you gave me, how hard you worked at it, now turn in your talent.....No, it will likely be, here are 10 talents more, go & write & write & write more glorious music.

God is not likely done creating new things for us to glorify him with.

Yet most of all, we will find our joy & gladness in Him.

Remind you of Paul's vision - taken up to the third heaven. 2 Cor 12:3-4 And I know that this man [speaking of himself] was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things He was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from being too elated.

So heavenly minded, no earthly good.

4. Overwhelmed by the Presence of Christ!?

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one.

Poor John, Scared to death, the images had overwhelmed his soul with their power. We can read them so fast, but most of them are past imaging....eyes like flames of fire...holding 7 stars in your hand, a sharp two edged sword in your mouth, face like the sun shining, In the presence of all that, "FEAR NOT!?" It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:31 Without his grace & forgiveness, couldn't survive it.

Like being transported to surface of the sun. or all the stars in the universe. So over stimulated, forget to breathe.

Fear not. Blessed words, we hear them in Scripture time & time again, one day they will become a reality in our souls.

Fear not! The message of Revelation, Fear Not, we have So much to look forward to. We have only begun our walk into the glory & beauty of God!

Transported to surface of sun, only survive if we had on a garment that could withstand the heat.

That garment will be provided, clothing washed in the Blood of the Lamb....another one of those images. Clothing washed white in the Blood of the Lamb? You've got to be kidding.

5. Crown of Life, & White Stone

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Note the promise of a crown of life is meant to help them resist, the hope will assist them in staying faithful. This stands as a contradiction to the idea being so heavenly minded, not earthly good.

[The crown of life Celebration - Coronation...not left to pick up from a dolly at the end, but given face to face, looking into his eyes after having one's chin raised, hearing, "Well Done, good & faithful servant.

Those ultimate words.....not hearing them, our lives will have been in vain.

Revelation 2:17 To the one who conquers, I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Buddhist idea that we be like a drop of water mixed into the ocean. No individuality. No uniqueness. No as much as we all alike, to God we will have a special name, a secret name, perhaps a name of endearment.

6. Wiping Away of Tears

Funeral readings, why crying in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Rev 7:17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Rev 21:4 He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Four reasons for weeping in the Kingdom [not punitive]
Burden, Truth, Absence, & Reconciliation

[I had heard these passages at countless funerals before the question occurred to me; why are they weeping? The first answer is that when we enter the Kingdom of God there's a tremendous sense of relief; relieved that we have finally come HOME. More than that a tremendous burden of fear will be lifted from our shoulders, a burden that we have carried so long that we have in some sense gotten used to it.

Think about how much fear we live in the midst of. We carry keys in our pockets because we are afraid of having our things stolen. We carry insurance because we are afraid of exceptional expenses. We worry about saving enough for retirement and subsequent medical expenses. We worry about harm coming to our children and to others that we love. We worry about terrorists. We learn to fear at an early age. I remember getting sick to my stomach reading about the 'cold war' as a child; of later wondering how I would protect my family in the event of a nuclear war especially during a

northern Wisconsin winter. (Jesus words: Pray that it might not happen in winter.) I was actually a little relieved to move to Racine that would likely be targeted by the Russians so most probably we wouldn't survive. Women fear walking the streets at night, children fear bullies, there is fear all about. We should not have to live this way. And that fear will be lifted from our shoulders. How glorious. However, I don't think those tears of relief are what this passage is speaking of.

2nd Reason: We worship a God of truth. It was said by Jesus in John's Gospel that I have come that you might know the truth and the truth will set you free. One commentator added, but first it will make you miserable. And it is true. If God is a God of truth, then we must know the truth. And the truth is that we have fallen far short of the glory of God; far short of the persons that God had in mind when he created us. I believe that we will have to be shown the persons we could have become. We will come to realize all the good that we could have done. We will see the consequences of all we failed to do. It has been said, "God veils our eyes in this life to full consequences of our sin to shield us from complete despair. But in the life to come we will see & weep.

However it is important for us to realize that God is not taking some kind of malicious pleasure in this. This isn't an enemy taking out his frustrations. He shows it out of love. For in seeing how much we have been forgiven, we are enabled to be so much more grateful and to glorify him for his saving act of grace in Jesus Christ. (think Simon the Pharisee: he who is forgiven little, loves little) The truth will redound to his glory.

The Third reason we will weep in the Kingdom is that Jesus indicates that there will be those we love who will not be there, those who at the heart of their being have chosen to love the darkness rather than the light. Not in Eucharist lectionary. Not as familiar a passage as it should be....

John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Their absence will be noted and grieved. But as much as we will grieve their absence it is important for us to realize that God grieves it more than we do. He loves them more than we do. The cross bears witness to that. And in some mysterious and grace filled way, he will come down from his throne and he will wipe away the tears from our eyes. St. Paul speaks of sorrowing yet always rejoicing. And perhaps that will be a continuing condition in the Kingdom, though probably not, for we are told that sorrow will be no more. There are two minor additions that I'd like to add here. This is not at all suggested by the text, but I wonder if it might not happen anyway. That just as the Lord God wipes away the tears from our eyes, so we might wipe away the tears from his eyes. It just seems that in the nature of God as we see it in Jesus, that we might be privileged to do so. But of course all of this is a metaphor because God doesn't have a face except in Jesus and no eyes either. The second addition is that since God is the source of all love and goodness and as such, the love and goodness that we loved in those who are absent will be seen in their fullness in Him. And that will likely help take many of the tears away.

Nos. looking into the eyes of God, is potentially a most frightening experience, only those who love God will be there to do so. For not only will we look into his eyes, but He will look into ours & see everything, our sins, our rebellion, our secrets that we have hid all our lives from others, & possibly from ourselves. But this is what we want isn't it, to be fully known, to be fully forgiven, to be fully accepted. What an intimate, glorious experience it will be.

The Fourth reason we will weep in heaven, I believe, is that we will be reconciled to the many people we are estranged from. Let us take for example a person who has lived a life of violence and corruption. There have been many lives that have been affected by his actions. At the end of life he comes to true repentance, is forgiven and enters the Kingdom of heaven. Now God could bring reconciliation with a word, but I wonder if that is his way. I think rather that this person will go around to each person he has knowingly and unknowingly wounded, not because he has been commanded to, but because he wants to, needs to. He will go around and listen to their pain and sorrow and he will ask their forgiveness for his part, and there will be tears of healing, relief, and resolution. It will be good. We all will be a part of this, both asking and granting forgiveness. And it may take a long time, but we do have all of eternity. Actually after being fully loved & having our souls exposed to the eyes of God, we will be doing the very same thing. Kind of like in the service, when we confess to God, we are absolved, & then we go out to exchange the peace. {The abused woman at the XXX Cursillo. So filled with love, being forgiven, mercy, peace, be able to do what she today finds impossible, to forgive that deeply

repentant man. Again thinking too small, not giving enough credit to Grace, Wouldn't it be terrible if her fear were realized. No, we shall see such forgiveness happen & we will weep in joy for it.}

7. The Holy City's Description

The earth has never known any city without sin. In Genesis the first city was Babel, a city which wanted to become as God, & tried to build a tower to heaven. Many people knowing the poverty & pain in our great cities would prefer a Kingdom out in the country away from the city if there had to be such, maybe small towns would be acceptable. But Scripture maintains that ultimately the Kingdom of God will be found in it's fullness within the city. Men & Women living together in peace....PEACE. Again we know so little of real PEACE.

Anticipation:

Pearly Gates (never shut)(Pearl of great price).....Streets of Gold....No night (& it was night)[one of you will betray me, give the morsel of bread to - So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. Jn 13:30]

Night – a time of fear & uncertainty, Ps 30:5 Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.

Terrible nights in our lives seemingly without end....can remember joy coming in the am.

After witnessing the crucifixion, did any of his disciples or 'the women' sleep well those two nights?

Life in utter darkness even with electric lights would be awful, but wouldn't actually living with no moral light be even worse? The two together, the absence of physical light & moral light, is a fate so terrible, it's beyond our comprehension.

Those unthinking statements about hell, the best parties are there, all my friends are there.....are so terribly short sighted. They are investing in lies & illusions without substance. What reason does one have to think that one will have friends in hell? Weep over that way of thinking

Rev 22 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 2 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. 3 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. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 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.

[There is so much in these 5 short verses!

The river of the water of life: this is a River - there will be no lack of this living water. The water we drink in this day sustains and maintains life. The water of life in the city of God will enhance life in ways that we cannot imagine or conceive. This water will be better than any champagne or wine we now know. And this is just the water; not the wine that we will drink in the company of our Lord at the messianic banquet.

This river will flow down the center of the city clear as crystal. Think of the rivers that run down the center of our cities. They aren't the open sewers of a few decades ago when amazingly in Cleveland the polluted water caught fire. But no one would describe them as clear as crystal. We might extrapolate from this that there will be no pollution in the City. Certainly there won't be any need for electric power for light, for the Lord God will be their light. No acid rain, no air pollution reaching half way across the world. No garbage dumps polluting the ground water. So much not to have to worry about! No need of a Sierra Club.

On either side of the river are the trees of life which bear a different kind of fruit each month of the year. No hunger will be found in the City either. Wouldn't farmers love to have such a tree? There's more; in Ezekiel's vision of the tree of life, the leaves are merely, if one can say merely, for healing. In Revelation, the leaves are for the healing of the nations. And certainly in this world of uncertainty and terrorism, of persecution and nuclear weapons, we see the need for the healing of the nations.

Furthermore: it says in Rev. 21:24 that the kings of the earth will bring their glory into the city. What might their glory be? It well might be the uniqueness of their people; the particular talents and perspectives of the different races and

nations. These things that cause fear in the world today: they don't talk, laugh, or think like us and so we fear them. In the Kingdom of Heaven we will celebrate the differences between peoples and nations, not fear them. The healing will have taken place. God loves diversity....mosquitoes 100,000 different species. Proverb, wouldn't life be boring if everyone were perfect....no, rather life boring if everyone were the same. symphonies. Perfection isn't static, it's dynamic.

AND his servants will worship him. I'm hopefully going to give a talk sometime maybe in the fall on worship in the Kingdom of God according to Rev. But those six words, '& his servants will worship him' cover such glory & splendor that we will never realize in this world. As grand as our worship can sometimes be, it's nothing to the reality of such that we will experience in the Kingdom of God.

They will see God face to face. There was fear expressed in Scripture that no one could see God and live. Yet in the Kingdom we will see him face to face. And like Moses our faces may be radiant as a result. You may remember that he had to put a veil over his face because the radiance of his face hurt the eyes of the Israelites. He had been with God. I think that helps make sense out of our having God's name on our foreheads. The thought of a brand or tattoo has always seemed to me to be disfiguring and unnecessary. But what if it means that after seeing the face of God, we will radiate in our own particular way the glory of God, and when people see us they'll think of God. "You have been with God," they say. God's name on our forehead would cause people to think of Him; our radiating his radiance would do the same. But I remind you again that all of this is metaphor because God has no face, he is Spirit.

At the end of this selection almost as an afterthought we are told that we are to reign forever and ever. In another translation it says, 'and they shall reign as kings and queens forever.' And I ask, reign over what? In Genesis 2 we were intended to rule over Eden forever but that was sabotaged by sin. That ruling was highlighted in part by our commission to name the animals. Now we know in Hebrew thought that naming was contingent on knowing the essence of that which was to be named. So this was no small, inconsequential task. And it's not too much of a stretch to think that the naming would've included the plants, hills, valleys, and rivers. And that furthermore what the man and the woman discussed with God in their cool of the evening walks may have been the discoveries of the day and the mulling over of the organization and keeping of their domain. This was done in the perspective of the splendor and glory of God's creation which was continually being unfolded to them as they explored the Garden. This too continues today as science in all of its disciplines discovers the splendor and glory of our universe in its micro and macro states. Unfortunately for many, their eyes are veiled and the splendor & glory are preposterously ascribed to chance. So it's not too much to think that we might all be given our own planet or galaxy to explore, name, organize, and discuss with our God. How many Grand Canyons, mountain tops, wild rivers, ocean depths, sunrises, moonlit evenings, jungle safaris, desert oases, and polar explorations are yet to be experienced? And after being ravished by such, we would walk in the cool of the evening, giving glory to the One who continues to create in such manifold and splendid ways.

But this can be expanded. We know three dimensions. But it's likely that there are many more. And if there are, it makes the vastness of our universe which is vast beyond our comprehension just a footnote in the immensity of the true universe. We know five senses, but there is no reason not to believe that there aren't many, many more senses that cannot be recognized by our bodies because they aren't wired for them. Surely our new bodies after the resurrection will be. So we could be given a new sense on occasion to experience the splendor of God's creation in a new way. All of this should be kept in the context that we have barely begun to explore the senses that we do have and that we could spend many lifetimes exploring just these five. How many know that much about music or particular instruments, or of painting and particular mediums. And even those who have studied one instrument or painting style for a lifetime realize that what they don't know outweighs what they do.

And it needs be said that life in the City of God will offer us pleasures that we have again only faintly tasted. The parties, the banquets, the conversations, the celebrations both large and small, the dinners, the picnics, the anniversaries, testimonials, the stories, the music, the drama, the comedy, the fellowship, even the study are all things we know something about; and there are likely countless joys of community that we have no experience of at all.

And above and beyond all of it, is our relationship with our Lord God. He will be our highest joy, our deepest pleasure, our chief delight, and our most precious treasure. He will be our all-surpassing happiness, our peace, our security, our life, our surpassing all-in-all.