

# The Heavenly City

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon explores the hope and glory of the new heaven and new earth as revealed in the Book of Revelation.*

**Duration:** 40:55

**Topics:** "Heaven"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of time and the linear nature of history according to the Bible. He then delves into the book of Revelation, specifically chapters 21 and 22, which describe the end of the world and the new heaven and earth. The sermon also mentions the judgment of non-believers at the great white throne judgment and the exclusion of liars from the city. The preacher concludes by referencing the last words of Jesus found in the book of Revelation.

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## Transcript

Today's a difficult day for me because I'm preaching from the hardest book for me to understand totally in the Bible. And that's the book of Revelation. That's the last book in the Bible, correct? What's the first book? What book has the most chapters? What's the longest Psalm? Good.

Don't read that one before you go to bed. Don't say, as we were saying earlier, you'll get to about Psalm 35 and you'll be. But all of God's word is profitable.

Some parts are easier to understand than others. There's historical narratives like we talked about last week, Jesus in the synagogue on a Sabbath. There's poetry, Psalms, Song of Solomon kind of.

There's poetic literature like Proverbs. There's doctrinal teaching like the book of Romans. There's lots of kinds of literature found in the Bible.

Revelation is different than all of them. It's prophetic mostly. It's apocalyptic.

It speaks about the end times and the end of the world. If the world has a beginning, it has to have an end. Only God is eternal.

So the book of Revelation begins with John, the same John who wrote the book of John, who was one of the 12 disciples. He also wrote first and second and third John. We find out in Revelation chapter one that because of the testimony of Jesus, because he's standing for Christ, he was persecuted and ended up on

an island called Patmos for the cause of Christ.

Some early Christians and leaders were killed, some left alone, some were martyred, some were persecuted. It depended what province and who was the emperor and who stirred up trouble. But John now is a very old man and he's writing this revelation.

It's called the Revelation of Jesus Christ that was given to John. And John is on the island and he says that on the Lord's day, Sunday, he is in the spirit. And while he's in the spirit, controlled by the Holy Spirit, vision, trance, dream, we're not sure, and he receives a revelation.

What does revelation mean? It means an unveiling so that something is covered and then you take off the cover and wow, that's a revelation to me. I didn't know that was under there. Here's a revelation first of Christ himself and words are spoken to him.

And the Lord, very direct to him, take down what I tell you, the visions I give you and make sure you spread it out. The Lord then follows by saying, I'm sending seven letters to seven existing churches. I wanna write them a letter.

John, take the letter down and make sure it gets there. So chapters two and three include seven letters written to seven churches. And all the letters are different, why? Because each church is different.

You can't take the situation of one church and say that's what God is saying to that church and transfer it to another church because every church is different. And the messages vary. Some are commending the saints, some are commending but I have this against you and some are just like, what's going on? You have a name that you live but you're really dead.

And the last letter is to a church that's not hot or cold but lukewarm and Jesus says, I'm gonna vomit you out of my mouth. So this is serious business in the book of Revelation. What follows then is John finds himself in heaven looking down on earth and now there's a lot of disagreement by the commentators and the preachers and the teachers of what the next 17 chapters really mean.

How does it, what's the, what's this mean on the ground? So there's seven pages or scrolls that have to be open. There's the opening of seven different, first there's four horsemen with riders on it and that has some meaning as it is shown to John. And then there's seven of this opened up and each one gives you a new picture of judgment and trouble and fire and famine and pestilence.

And then there's seven trumpets followed by seven bowls of wrath that are poured out. So the book of Revelation is God settling matters on earth or earth that's been in rebellion against him. So then we get to the description of the final chapter of judgment, not the judgment of Christians, which is at the judgment seat of Christ, but the great white throne judgment where the books are opened up and everything that everyone has done who doesn't know Christ are opened up so that no one says an excuse or a rationalization.

And there's the great white throne judgment. So after this judgment is made, the scene moves to, I'm obviously moving through it quickly. The scene moves to another vision or a site that brings in the end of time and the end of this earth.

So our problem this morning, this afternoon, even as we begin is how do I describe and how do we receive from the Bible things that we can hardly imagine? All we have ever known in our lives is time. When you

were born, what's today, what's next week, when your grandmother died has a beginning, has an end. History, especially in the Western world and according to the Bible is linear.

It's linear, it's not circular like some religions have. It's not circular like Buddhism. It's linear and it's moving toward a goal.

And now Revelation 21, 22 is telling us how it all ends. But again, it's so hard because what do you mean no time? No minutes, no seconds, no end? How, what is that? And it begins to describe things as I'm gonna read here in a moment that we can only say God open our eyes and give us a revelation of something of what that will be like because it's not something we've experienced. When Jesus talked about farming and he talked about a lost sheep, we could all relate to that but this is in another world, exactly another world.

So let's read in Revelation 21 about how it all ends. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. Let's just stop there for a second.

So the heavens around our earth, the world, the universe around us is now God and there's this earth that we know with continents and oceans, Pacific, Atlantic and Argentina and Greenland and Europe and Asia, it's gone, no mass. But John sees a new heaven and a new earth and the Greek denotes not a renovation of this earth like fix it up, it's finito, it's gone. There's a new heaven and a new earth.

What does it look like? Well, you can read it later but we just know it's a new heaven and a new earth. And as he's looking, by the way, it has no sea. Commentators differ about that.

Let me just say something about this on the way to where we are. Those chapters that I told you with the opening of the scroll and the opening of the sounding of the trumpets and the seven bowls, commentators, let's say I have 15 commentaries upstairs in my library just on the book of Revelation, they differ. One writer sees it this way, another writer says, no, it means that.

Take for example, Antichrist 666, what does that mean? Did Antichrist already live? Is he still coming? Commentators were sure he was Hitler, who killing all the Jews, God's people. No, he's not, it wasn't Hitler. It was this one, it was that one.

And the views change. Now the view that's held strong for the last 100 years, a certain view for 400 years before that, Christians did not see it that way. So the book of Revelation, why I'm saying all this is for this, never fight with anybody about the symbolic language of Revelation because we're not sure.

Great men and women of God who the Lord used in amazing ways saw it one way. Someone then saw it another way. What are we gonna do, fight? Why don't we just serve Jesus? Do I get a witness? And spread the gospel and love one another rather than what? You think, no, that means that, that means that.

That's what a lot of people do. They fuss and fight. And if you disagree with their view, you're like a heretic.

But these are not primary things. This is not the virgin birth of Christ, that he died on the cross, that we're saved by faith alone through God's grace. That's not this.

These are, this is symbolism. And I have discussions with pastors who come here and preach, and we discuss it. At Lent, Tony Evans and I were discussing it last time he was here.

And to be honest with you, I'm not sure of it myself, some of it, that's why I don't preach much on it because how can I stand in front of you and say, thus saith the Lord, when I don't know of it, thus saith the Lord. I know what it says, but what does it mean? Compende, no comprende. So just never get in a fight with anyone.

Just love people. We're never gonna agree on everything. Do I get an amen on that? On the primary things, oh yes, yes.

So, he sees this new heaven and new earth. And as he's admiring it or overwhelmed by it, he sees, go back please to that first passage, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. Keep it there, please, keep it back there.

So now he sees a city. What's the city look like? The description of it follows, I'm not gonna give it to you. It's so overwhelming.

He's naming every beautiful stone, gem, diamonds. In fact, the streets in heaven are made of? Gold. Gold.

And he describes all that. But he sees the city and he calls it the holy city and it's the new Jerusalem, has nothing to do with the city in Israel. It's the new Jerusalem.

And it's coming down out of heaven. And it's obviously where God's people are in this city. And going back to that passage again, sorry.

It's prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband like the church is the bride of Christ and Christ is the husband. And now it'll be consummated, the wedding will happen as we're all together. Now we read on.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down for these words are trustworthy and true. He said to me, it is done.

I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, the city and everything in it.

And I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, that word comes from word means to pollute. The murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

This is the second death. Now, before we close, I'm gonna give you the last words of Jesus found in the book of Revelation. If you have one of those books where his, Bibles where his words are in red, these are the last words.

But let's just try to digest all of this. So we covered the fact that there's a new order of things. The old as we have known it is totally gone.

There's a new heaven and a new earth. A new earth with no sea for some reason. Commentators disagree on what's the significance of that.

They see the sea as separation and threatening, water can be, tsunamis and all of that, there'll be no sea. And in this new heaven and new earth, he sees the holy city coming down from above into this new heaven and earth configuration. Notice two things about this new Jerusalem.

It's the city where we're gonna spend eternity. I don't know if you like the country, but you're gonna live in the city. How many don't mind living in the city when it's the new Jerusalem? Yeah, I'll take that.

We don't know what kind of houses, condos, whatever, that's left silent in the Bible. Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you, but we have no real clarity on how that will all be. I just wanna be there.

So this holy city comes down and notice what characterizes the city, two things. Number one, it's the holy city. There'll be nothing nasty in that city.

No sin, no filth, no pornography, no violence, no lies, no racism, no prejudice, no anger, it's holy. Holy is what God is, remember? Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Almighty.

So the first thing about the city is the atmosphere is total purity and holiness. Number two, even though there's topaz and sapphires and all of that and the streets are gold, it seems that the greatest blessing, it is not seems, the greatest blessing of the city that we're gonna spend eternity in, if you're a Christian, is the fact that God is there. His presence is immediate.

Four times in that verse, it says, and God will dwell with them. God will be with them. He will be their God.

They will be his people, for the Lord himself will dwell. Let me ask a question. How many here have ever been in a meeting or a time alone with the Lord where you have sensed the beautiful presence of the Lord? Just lift your hand.

You've ever felt the presence of the Lord? That would be like one millionth of a bubble compared to what's waiting. All that we experience is the Holy Spirit making Jesus real to us. That's all we experience.

And it's wonderful, it's beautiful. Am I right? Overwhelming sometimes. You weep like a baby.

That's nothing. That's zero compared to when we see him. We're gonna see his hands.

We're gonna see his face. We're gonna be right there with him and him with us. His glory.

Can you imagine to live in the glory of God, to live in the presence immediate of Jesus? That's what makes heaven so heavenly. It's not the furniture or the streets. It's that God is there.

This is what God has always wanted. When he created Adam and Eve, sin came in the world. What did that bring? Separation.

He came in the cool of the evening to have fellowship with them and they were hiding. Why were they hiding? Because they knew they were naked. Why? Because they had sin.

And now sin came in and polluted this whole world. Separation from God. He had to send his son Jesus to bridge that separation and bring us to him.

His longing is come unto me. Not to church, me. I wanna be with you.

When you love someone, you wanna be with them. That's why you get married. Because you wanna be there with them.

That's what he wants. He wants to be with us. Isn't that amazing? People like you and me, he wants to be with us.

That's how much he loves us. If you're happy about that, can we put our hands together and just clap? So the beauty of heaven is he is there. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

And we have services like that where God says, I'm gonna just manifest myself a little bit. But that's nothing now compared to the overwhelming majesty, glorious presence of the Almighty. I mean, it's something we can't even imagine.

So it's the holy city. And then the Bible tells us what the life is like in the city, what happens in that city. Number one, every tear is wiped away.

There's no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain forever. Again, I can say those sentences. Let's analyze them.

But can any of us imagine that? First of all, he cares so much about us that he makes a point, I'll wipe away every tear. I know what you've suffered. I know you go through, whether it's the hardships of life, broken heart with your children, your family, whatever the thing might be, someone hurting you, someone stabbing you in the back, figuratively.

I know that you go through things that make you cry. I, God, will wipe away every tear. There will be no tears in the new Jerusalem.

There'll be no death. We're never gonna part from each other. We're gonna hang out forever.

If you don't wanna be with Christians now here on earth, you really better check yourself, I suggest that. Because why would God punish you by sending you to heaven where you're just gonna be with believers? If your phone is your main thing in your life or entertainment and TV and movies and sports, if that's your main thing, you're missing out on the atmosphere of heaven. Heaven is God and us together.

No more tears, no more death, no more separation, no funerals, no disease, no temptation, no devil, no flesh to deal with. No sorrow, no regret, no sadness of any kind, no crying, no pain, mental pain, mental anguish, anxiety, nervousness, complexes, gone. Praise God, come on, let's say amen to that.

That's the promise of God. Notice, this was so real to the early Christians that they went through a lot of stuff and never complained because heaven was real. If heaven's not real to us, if the New Jerusalem is a joke, then everything that happens to you here is, I don't know, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And they were getting put in prison and killed and as one of the martyrs said, one of the martyrs said, look, you're gonna kill me. I think they were burning this one to death. And he said, you can't touch the real me because when you have your way with me, you send me to be with my Jesus forever.

But if this world and your salary and your IRA and your whatever is everything, then everything's shaking and rocking. But they were like, what's it gonna be, 100 years, 90 years, 80 years, how long will I live? And

then that's waiting for me forever, forever, forever. You don't know what to say, amen? I don't like you either.

How about that? Only joking, forever, forever. Did you hear what I said? Forever, no death, no mourning. Listen, no sadness, no crying, no pain of any kind, no stubbing of your toe, no mental anguish, no not sleeping at night.

The question even is, is whether we'll sleep. But anyway, we have the guarantee of that kind of life in the city. That's what it's gonna be like, unless God is a liar.

And Jesus, as you'll read in a moment with me, unless Jesus is a liar, but he's not, he's the truth. So now we find out those who are in the city, let's close. Who's in that city? Well, this passage says those who are victorious.

What's that mean? Notice the two plights of all mankind. Everyone you know, including you, and every ancestor, and every child and grandchild, there's only two ultimate destinies, in the city or outside the city. No third choice, no purgatory, no place that you can work yourself up to acceptability into the city.

So who's in the city? Those who are victorious, what does that mean? Well, the people who are victorious are the ones who ran the race, and kept on believing, and endured everything, and said, I'm going to that finish line, and I'm keeping my eyes on Jesus. And when I stumble, I'll get up, because he still loves me. And I'm going to keep trusting, oh, that's not easy.

Oh, I was going on the wrong road, he pulled me back by my scruff of my neck, I'm staying on that road, I'll keep believing, I'll keep loving, even though people are ugly as can be, I'll keep loving, I'm not going to lose my cool, because I got to make it to that city. I'm going to keep trusting, I'm going to keep praying, I'm going to keep in my word, I'm going to keep fellowshiping with my brothers and sisters. They're not perfect, but neither am I, but I'm not going to let the devil rip me off that I don't finish the race.

Come on, let's say amen, I'm going to be a victorious believer. That's who the Bible says is in the city. I didn't say that, I just read to you from the word of God.

Who's outside the city? Who is forbidden to enter that holy Jerusalem? Number one, the cowardly. It comes from the word to draw back. Seems to be the ones who start, and then because of pressure and persecution and peer pressure and what the family thinks and the people on the job, and I got to fit in with everybody, they draw back.

They're like the seeds that were planted on the rocky ground, shallow. They started out with flowers, with plant life, but then when persecution, Jesus said, came because of the word, they drew back because they had no depth. Those people are outside the city.

The ones who draw back, turn their back on Jesus, throw them under the bus. No, no, no, you can't, you can't be in that city. The next definition, those outside the city are the unbelieving.

Those are those who either start believing and stop or they refuse to believe in what God has said about his son and what Jesus did on the cross. Even though millions and millions have had their lives changed by the power of Christ, they refuse to believe that. They're like the Pharisees who saw Jesus healed people, but they refused to believe because it would have rocked their world.

And they liked the perks that they had going on in their little two bit world. They weren't about to think of eternity. They just thought about the here and now.

Unbelieving. Number three, not in the city, forever cast away from the city are the vile. That comes from a word to pollute.

Those are people who have been permeated by the culture. All the filthiness of this world, America included. All that junk and nonsense and filth, they're permeated in their thinking, their behaviors.

It includes unnatural vices and natural vices. They're vile. They cannot go in that holy city.

No, no, no. They practice vileness. They practice abominations to God.

I know, but my friend said, what does it matter what your friend said? Look at me, please. What does it matter what anyone says? If it's God, we all have to stand before. Wait, wouldn't you be most interested in what the creator has to say? Who will determine all of our destinies? Wouldn't we be thinking about that every day? Oh, no wonder Paul says, live a life pleasing to God.

After the vile, those permeated by the pollution of this world, the fornicators, I'm sorry, the murderers. Murderers are those who have no respect for human life. They justify taking human life.

Whether it's a Hitler with the gas chambers in World War II or however. And that includes hate. Because Jesus said, if you hate somebody, you're a murderer even though you never drew a gun on them.

So no haters will be in heaven. No white haters, black haters, Latino haters. They cannot come because it's a holy city.

Because they're murderers in their heart. If you say you hate your brother, you're a murderer, Jesus said. So haters have no place.

I know, but the guy's a pastor. I know, but he's a hater. He's a hater.

She's a hater. I know she sings in the choir. He's a deacon.

He's a hater. Don't you get it? I'm reading the Bible to you now. I'm not going by the system we're used to.

I'm telling you what God says. Then on top of that, no fornicators will come in the city. Those are people who practice sex unrepentantly outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

People who practice sex, who sleep around outside of the marriage between a man and a woman, they are called fornicators and their place will be outside the city forever. Ever. Now, this has, you know, Satan is very clever.

If you preach this or just read it from the Bible, hater, judgmental, but see that's Satan trying to justify something God says is an abomination. Comprehend? No comprehend. So long time ago, my wife came in my office and said, Jim, I need your help.

I got an applicant for the choir and there's a problem. So I came into the, with her and I'm walking and I'm saying, fill me in. And she says, well, this girl was tested vocally.

Vocal tests come first. And her voice is off the chart. Amazing voice.

But there's a problem. She's living with her boyfriend. And according to, God calls that fornication.

You say, I don't see it that way. Hey, what can I tell you? I only work here. I'm just reading the Bible to you.

I'm saying God calls it the sin of fornication. Let me say amen. Not in a harsh way because we're all sinners.

So be easy on that. I don't ever like to be around Christians who, when you're talking about something like this, they go, yeah. Amen.

Amen. Preach it, brother. That's not the spirit of Christ.

Amen. So she came in. I went into Carol's music room and she was sitting there.

I said, I hear there's a problem. What problem? What problem? Problem is you're living with your boyfriend. And if you're going to get up there and sing in the choir, we would want to know if you're really a Christian and you want to follow the Lord.

I don't get it. We might get married one day. Oh, that's good news.

But listen, God loves me, right, pastor? Yeah. He wants me to be happy, right? Yeah. Being with him makes me happy.

So thus God says, you go, girl. Right? Haven't you ever heard that reasoning? If it feels good, it's gotta be good. Because I'm the center of the universe.

Whoever feels good to Jim Cymbala, that must be right. So I tried to reason with her. She started to cry.

I was gentle. I tried to read some verses to her. The works of the flesh are these things.

Anyone who practices these things will never enter the kingdom of heaven. I know it's quiet here because some of you have been under the influence of that fuzzy kind of thinking in the churches you've come from or your friends or what you watch on TV or the junk you read. And you think that I'm coming like some dinosaur.

I'm not. God's gonna remind you what I said today. God will remind you, every one of us, starting with me.

So as we're talking, I said, look, I'm gonna fight for you. And I moved my chair up a few feet so I could face her. She was sitting in her office.

I'm gonna fight for you like you're my daughter, like you're my Sue or my Chrissy, my James. You can't do this. Please don't do this.

We'll get a place for you to stay. You can stay with one of the choir members or a member of the church. I'll call the guy.

I've done this before. Let me call him. Let me explain to him.

Let me make him an offer he can't refuse. That sounds like the Godfather, right? So, no, let me talk to him. Here's my private number.

Let him call me. Please, I'll do anything, but don't do this. And she went, you mean I can't be in the choir? I went, the choir, who cares about the choir? I'm talking about your soul.

I'm talking about your eternal destiny. I'm talking about the new Jerusalem. So there's a little combativeness here in the atmosphere, but I'm gonna persevere.

It doesn't matter what you think. Listen to me, sir. Listen to me, ma'am.

I'm not peddling what you wanna hear today. I'm trying to preach the word of God to you for the sake of your soul, because I gotta go to bed tonight and make sure I don't have any blood on my hands that I told you some slippery new kind of Christianity. There is none.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Well, she cried. We prayed.

She took my number. No one ever called me. We never saw her again, and so it goes.

But guess what? On judgment day, God will not be able to say to me, at least in this case, well, you cheap minister, you sold out to get her in your church, and you told her what you needed to hear so you could just have her in the church. Listen, we were down in Florida during the pandemic. We had a minister come up to us who said, listen, talking to Carol, he was in the music, or yeah, over the music in his church, praise and worship.

Look, so we just found out that our worship leader is sleeping around, and you know, it's not good. So what do you feel, Pastor Jim, Carol? We were thinking of not letting her be the leader, but she could still be in the group, but not the leader. You know, that would look bad.

And I went, I don't even know how to talk to you. What book do you read? Do you read this book at all? That person needs help. They're not to be hated, they're to be pitied, but we gotta help that person.

Forget worship leading, we gotta get them right with God. Are you with me on this? Or how many are with me? Just clap your hands, okay? That's good. That's good.

Thank you, Jesus, for helping me today. So then finally, all the liars are kept outside the city, people who love and practice a lie. They're liars.

What they seem to be, they're not. They're players. You know a player.

You know, you're a player. They'll all be kept out of the city. I'm just reading to you from the word of God.

Don't say he had an ax to grind, or he's harsh. I am gonna entreat you here in the name of the Lord. So what's this all mean? Those people are kept out of the city forever.

Let me give you, as we close, the last words of Jesus Christ. Look up at the screen. Last words found in Revelation, next chapter.

Look, I'm coming soon. My reward is with me, and I'll give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to eat, I'm sorry, to the tree of life, and may go through the gates into the city. Outside, Jesus said, are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.

I am the root and the offspring of David and the bright morning star. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the bride say, come, and let the one who hears say, come, and let the one who's thirsty come, and the one who wishes to take the free gift of the water of life, come. Those are the last words of Jesus, just about.

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