

## What Will Heaven Feel Like?

On Sunday, we continued our current sermon series by studying a vision of heaven that includes a dramatic plot twist meant to teach us something really important about suffering.

1. Warm-up Question: We love stories that have unexpected, dramatic plot twists. What's one of your favorite plot twists in a movie?
2. At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff asked, "What's the greatest source of suffering you have ever experienced?" How would you answer that question?
3. One of the Bible's most famous verses about heaven declares, "God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." Revelation 21:4. We typically assume that means all earthly suffering will disappear when we get to heaven to be remembered no more, as if it never happened. Jeff suggested that would be a misinterpretation of the verse, especially given what Revelation 5 tells us about heaven. Read Revelation 5:1-14.
  - a. At the time the book of Revelation was written, the early Christians were suffering greatly at the hands of the Roman Empire. John desperately wanted to know what the future held for him and his fellow Christians. The scroll John sees in his vision contained the answers. But no one was found worthy to open the scroll, leaving John bitterly disappointed. Suppose there was a scroll detailing what the future holds for you. Would you want to read it? Why or why not?
  - b. Just as John is about to give up on the scroll, surprise! Someone is found worthy to open it – "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David." These two terms refer to Jesus. Why do you think Jesus is called "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah?" When you hear that name for Jesus, what visual image comes to mind?
  - c. Why do you think Jesus is called "the Root of David?" When you hear that name, what visual image comes to mind?
  - d. After one of the elders announces Jesus will appear to open the scroll, we encounter the dramatic plot twist. When Jesus appears, he doesn't look anything like a mighty lion or a regal king. According to verse 6, he appears in the form of "a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered." Describe in detail what you think John saw when Jesus appeared, then compare that to the photo Jeff showed on Sunday (reproduced on p. 3).
  - e. Suppose you had been in heaven when Jesus appeared in the form John describes. How do you think you would have reacted? What feelings would this evoke?
  - f. Why do you think Jesus appeared in the form of "a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered?" What's the point? What do you think we're supposed to learn from this?

4. If there are no tears or pain in heaven, you'd think Jesus wouldn't appear in a form that vividly depicts his brutal earthly suffering. The fact that he did suggests that he had already healed from that suffering and turned it into something beautiful, so that remembering the cross ceased to be painful and instead became a celebration of what he overcame and of the great good accomplished through his suffering.
  - a. Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his stripes we are healed." What does that tell us about the meaning of Jesus' suffering?
  - b. Revelation 5:11 says, "By your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God. . . ." What does this tell us about the meaning of Jesus' suffering?
  - c. That last thing Jesus said on the cross was, "It is finished." There's a line in the worship song "So Will I," that says, "And as he speaks, a hundred billion failures disappear." Give an example of something you're ashamed of that you once did that you're now released from because Jesus took the penalty on the cross.
  
5. Hebrews 2:10 says, "It was fitting that God . . . should make the pioneer of [our] salvation (i.e., Jesus) perfect through sufferings." In other words, Jesus' suffering made him even more beautiful. And what was true for Jesus is also meant to be true for us in our own small way. James 1:2 says, "Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
  - a. What do you think James 1:2 means? Do you believe it? Why or why not?
  - b. To help us understand what our lingering scars from earthly tragedy might feel like in heaven, Jeff shared the story of a dad in Hawaii who rescued his 6-month-old son from being swept away in a tsunami. In the process, the dad badly damaged his hands and feet in the wreckage, leaving permanent scars. How do you think that dad feels now, years later, when he sees those scars? What does that tell us about how we'll feel in heaven about scars from our earthly suffering?
  - c. Jeff said, "What we'll need in heaven is not to forget our earthly suffering, but to heal from it, learn from it, and be deepened by it, so that it gets turned into something beautiful." Think back to the answer you gave to Question 2 (the greatest source of suffering you've experienced). What have you learned from it? How has it deepened you? Someday in heaven, can you imagine looking at the scars from that suffering and, instead of weeping, actually celebrate that you triumphed over that suffering and drew something beautiful from it?

*Remember, heaven will not be a place of forgetfulness. It will be a place where even our worst memories get redeemed and turned into something beautiful, as part of God's redemptive plan!*

**An approximation of the form in which Jesus appeared in Revelation 5:6:**

