

Imagine...

## I. Introduction:

### A. There's this story of a guy who worked for the

**Government:** & He's in his office / & He's Bored / & He's not getting much done... & He looks on top of a filing cabinet→ & See an old lamp... & He starts to polish it→ When out comes Genie... (& the genie says) "I'm here to grant you three wishes"... (& the guy is thinking) "Yeah, right"... (& so he says) "OK, I want an ice cold Coke" -- & Poof, there's an ice cold coke in his hand... & So, he thinks pretty quickly→ Realizing he needs to be more careful with his next two: & after thinking a bit→ (he says) "I would like to be on a beautiful tropical island" -- & Poof, there he was on a Island paradise... & Then he looks to the genie & says: "& For my third wish→ I'd like to never have to work again" -- & Poof, he was back in his Government Office

### B. We've all had our "I wish I was somewhere else"

**moments:** In fact, sometimes we so Embellish our desires to be some place else-- That if we ever get the chance to go there→ We risk Disappointment... **BUT there's one place I want to see**→ That will be even more than you or I can imagine... & So, I would like to close this series **By** getting you to do just that – Imagine...

**C. I mentioned earlier in this series:** (That I've heard throughout my life) "Heaven is more wonderful than we could ever imagine": & Yet, (nonetheless) God purposefully invites us to imagine what Heaven will actually be like... After all, **We can only Desire what we can Imagine...** & That's

Why God graciously gives us a Glimpse of heaven thru the Scriptures→ **As He** offers us valid reference points to understand heaven-- **Concepts** (clues) like Gardens / Cities / Resurrected Bodies / New Earth... **You See**, they all afford us a bridge to Fire up our imagination→ & Kindle our desire for heaven... **& So Clearly**, God does expects us to use our imaginations→ **Even while** recognizing its Limitations & Flaws... **So, let me say this:**

**In one sense, ALL our views of heaven are Incorrect→ B/C none of them are Good enough... It's like the moment recorded in I**

**Kings 10:** **When** the **Queen of Sheba** came to check out the splendor of Solomon's Kingdom→ **That** she had heard so much about... **& After witnessing it for herself:** (she says) "**Everything** I've heard about you & your Kingdom is true→ **But** it's not enough.... **B/C** not half had been told me→ **Of** what I have actually seen"... **& That's how I feel about this series:** **It's** not that I'm concerned that what I've taught isn't true→ **It's** that what I've taught isn't enough... (As C.S. Lewis put it) "*While reason is the natural organ of truth→ Imagination is the organ of meaning*"...

### **III. Other than Jesus, I only know (for certain) of two people-- Who actually have seen heaven→ & Lived to talk about it:**

**You might** remember how the **Apostle Paul** reluctantly opens up→ **About** the Vision of heaven he received from God in **II Corinthians 12:3-4** (When speaking of himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, he says) "**And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows — was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell**"... In other words: "**I'm not** permitted to tell you everything I saw-- **But** even if I could→ **I don't** have the words for it (Human language isn't adequate enough to describe some of the things I saw)"... **What intrigues me though:** **Is that** some 40-50 years later the **Apostle John** was also given a vision of heaven→ **& He** was Commanded to share what he saw... **& So, today:** **I would** like for us to spend our time imaging heaven-- **As we** look through the eyes of John / **& Envision** what is perhaps the

greatest image of God's new creation to come (God's cosmic renewal) -- (i.e.) The Marriage of Heaven & Earth... **In Revelation 21** John reveals to us the glorious picture of a City that is to come (Presently in heaven→ But destined for earth)... **Read with me** as John introduces this to us in **Revelation 21**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city (the new Jerusalem)→ Coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain→ And he showed me the holy city (Jerusalem) descending out of heaven from God... It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone (like jasper as clear as crystal)... The city wall was broad and high→ With twelve Gates guarded by twelve angels: And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates... There were three gates on each side—east/north/south/& west... The Wall of the city had twelve foundation stones: And on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked to me held in his hand a Gold Measuring Stick to measure the City/its Gates /& its Wall... When he measured it, he found it was a square (as wide as it was long)... In fact, its length and width and height were each 12,000 Stadia (1,400 miles) Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 feet thick -- According to the human standard used by the angel

**A. Imagine the Culture of heaven:** **15X's** in Revelation 21-22-- **The** place God & His people will live together→ **Is** called a **"City"**...

**By the way**, I'm not convinced that this is merely a figure of speech→ **But I** tend to believe that it's actually a Real place... **After All**, where do we expect Physically Resurrected people to live→ **If Not** in a Real/Physical Place?... Note how he says→ **"By man's measurements": I mean**, if this is a real

city / **&** These are real dimensions-- **How else** could God communicate this→ **In Order To** convince us He's talking about a real place?... **& it's Massive!:** **This place** is 1,400 miles long/wide/high... **To put in perspective**, that would be a Metropolis that would stretch→ **From** Canada to Mexico / **& From** the Appalachian Mountains to Arizona... **But Regardless of whether these numbers are purely figurative or not:** **Nonetheless**, it tells me this-- **That** in the supernatural enormity of this city→ **There's** plenty of room for all... **& In keeping with the Cultural Personality of a city:** **Heaven** is going to be a place of overwhelming Beauty / Community / & Diversity... **& It will be** a place filled with Natural Wonders / Magnificent Architecture / & Thriving Culture→ **But Without** the Crime / Pollution / Fear / Fatalities / & Homelessness... **& It would seem that beyond the massive size of this city:** **The Height** of the city is it's most dramatic feature-- **What humanity** could not accomplish in Babel (i.e. A city that reached into the heavens)→ **God** will then grant as an overwhelming gift...

**B. Imagine the Residents of heaven:** **I'm sure** you noticed something interesting about this City-- (i.e.) It's a **Perfect Cube** (It's just as Long / as it is Wide / as it is High)... **Now think with me for just a second:** **What's** the only other place built in a cube in the Bible?-- **Why**, it was the place at the core of the Temple called the Holy of Holies / **It was** the place that God Himself in essence lived... **Now later on John will tell us that there was no Temple in the City:** **& You know why?**→ B/C the whole city is a Temple / **The** whole City is the Holy of Holies-- **Meaning** that we get to make our residence in the very presence of God... **You See**, the Most Impressive thing about this city→ **Is that** God Himself will live there!-- (as John tells us) **"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them"...** **No Wonder** we're told that **Abraham** was never able to settle down→ B/C he was looking for a Better City... **I Mean**, when

you have your heart set on a City like this→ **Why**, you're going to be a Pilgrim all your life...

### **C. Then imagine the Security of heaven:** You might

wonder why such a place would need Walls... After All, God will have already (Utterly & Permanently) defeated His Enemies-- So, there won't be any enemies outside the gates... **Well, I believe** the Walls are a statement→ **About** God's Might & Commitment to Protect His people / **& The Absolute Safety** that we'll enjoy in heaven... **Let me tell you, when God's destroys His enemies→ There's not going to be any possibility of a Sequel:** You know how it is as you get to the end of Movies-- It seems every time evil is defeated→ **There's** always that flicker of life revealed right at the very end (making room for a Sequel)... **But in this story:** There's not going to be any sequel... (As John tells us in **Revelation 21:25**) **"Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there"...** Now even Disneyland (which bills itself as "The happiest place on earth") closes its gates at night... But this City doesn't need to-- It needs no Security Check Points or Metal Detectors→ **B/C "Nothing evil will ever enter"...** The Only exposure to sin we'll ever have in heaven→ **Is** when we see the Scars on Jesus' Body...

**Now, do you understand what this means?:** It means we'll finally be able to live one day without the greatest Joy-stealer -- **Worry**... You See, we worry now-- B/C there are things that we care about→ **That** we can't guarantee will be safe (Our Health / Families / Fortune / Ministries)... **Well, what John is trying to say:** Is that the day is going to come→ **When** we'll get to say, "I don't have to worry anymore"... **Now just imagine how that's going to change how you Talk to God:** Right now, most of what we have to say to God is Need-Oriented... & So, when we get to heaven→ **I guess** we're going to have to learn a whole new way to talk to God-- B/C when we get to heaven (& all the safety issues are taken care of)→ **We won't** have any needs &

worries to bring up anymore... **& Guess Then** that we'll be able to spend all our time talking to God→ **About** why we think He's so Good / **& About** all the reasons we love our new home...

**D. Then imagine the Beauty of heaven:** It like the father & daughter who were standing outside looking up at the stars... (& the little girl said) "**Oh, daddy**, if the wrong side of heaven is this pretty→ What's the other side going to look like?"... **You See, John's Vision boggles the mind:** As he tries to describe the Materials God is going to use to build this City starting in **Revelation 21:18-21**

The wall was made of jasper / And the city of pure gold (as pure as glass)... The Foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone-- The first foundation was jasper / the second sapphire / the third agate / the fourth emerald / the fifth onyx / the sixth ruby / the seventh chrysolite / the eighth beryl / the ninth topaz / the tenth turquoise / the eleventh jacinth / and the twelfth amethyst... The twelve gates were twelve pearls→ Each gate made of a single pearl... The great street of the city was of gold→ As pure as transparent glass.

**Now you might take these descriptions→ As being Exclusively Vivid poetic metaphors:** (& perhaps it is) **But I'm** not so quick to dismiss this as a Physical description... **After All**, something can possess symbolic significance→ **&** Still be very real and tangible... e.g. **My Wedding Ring** symbolizes the commitment I have to Mary→ **But** that doesn't mean it's not also a Literal ring... **& So, Yes**, the open gates of heaven remind us just how Welcoming & Accessible God will be in heaven→ **But** that doesn't mean there won't be literally gates / **& I've** had wonderful walks on Paved-roads & Natural-Trails→ **So what** would be wrong with walking on Gold?... **You might remember how** back in the Paradise of Eden (before the Fall)→ **The**

**book of Genesis** describes how the land possessed Gold & Precious Gems... You See, to live in a Place surrounded by precious Gems & Metals→ **Only Became** a temptation when our nature was corrupted by sin... **But in heaven**, all these beautiful things God has made→ **Will** (once again) be our Servants & not our Masters... **In Fact, John implies that Eden will be restored in heaven:** As he continues to describe how heaven will have a Central Park in **Revelation 22:1f**

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life (as clear as crystal)→ Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb / Down the middle of the great street of the city... On each side of the river-- Stood the tree of life→ Bearing twelve crops of fruit (yielding its fruit every month)... And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations... No longer will there be any curse.

**We were designed by God to live in Paradise→ Not in a fallen world:** We were made for the New heavens & the New Earth... I'm sure we're all familiar with the famous painting of the **Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci**... The Original was actually painted on the end wall of the dining hall→ At the monastery of **Santa Maria delle Grazie** (& was completed in 1498)... **Unfortunately, in less than 60 years after it was finished** this painting had already deteriorated so badly→ **That** the figures were Unrecognizable... & It could have been restored again to its original glory-- **But** there's was only one problem→ **The** artist (da Vinnci) was gone... **Well since then**, multiple attempts have been made to Restore it (the last attempt completed in 1999)... **But even** with human ingenuity & Technology→ **It's** understood that this beautiful mural will never be restored to its original glory... **Well, when God brings us into the New Heavens & the New Earth:** God Himself will have restored His own work of Art-- **The Curse** is going to be lifted / & We're going to possess New Bodies & Glorified Minds→ **So that** we'll be able to appreciate the Genius of God's Creation... **But the best thing of all: Is that** the **Artist** is going to live in the



neighborhood... **In Fact**, God is going to be the Most Beautiful thing about heaven... **I don't** know if you have thought much about this→ **But** where do you think Beauty comes from? – God!

#### IV. Back in 1971, **John Lennon** released his song

**“Imagine”**: **In 2004**, Rolling Stone ranked "Imagine" at #3→ **In its** list of "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time"... **It's** a song that calls for world-wide peace... **Do you remember how it begins?**: *Imagine there's no heaven→ It's easy if you try / No hell below us→ Above us only sky / Imagine all the people→ Living for today...* You See, John Lennon believed that is was belief in God & heaven→ **That** got in the way of world-wide peace (**Why** is it that religion always gets a bad rap?)... **But the Apostle John sees the irony in this:** (i.e.) **Heaven** is the Vindicating Answer to all the world's problems... **So**, imagine that there's no heaven?-- **Why** would I want to do that?... **In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Marco Polo** (at the age of 17)→ **Took an epic journey to Asia:** **He would** be the first European to ever see & experience the enchanted land of China... **& Through** an amazing set of circumstances→ **Marco** became a favorite of the most powerful ruler on planet earth -- Kublai Khan... **Well, after serving Kublai Khan for 17 years: Marco** began his journey home to Venice→ **Loaded** down with gold / silk / & spices... **When he arrived home**, 13th Century Europeans found it impossible to believe Marco's tales of faraway lands→ & Ended up dismissing his stories as Mythical & Fabricated... **At his Deathbed: His family** priest rebuked him for spinning lies→ (& along with his family, friends) **The priest** begged him to recant his tales of China... **But** setting his jaw / & gasping for breath→ (Marco spoke his final words) *"I have not told you even half of what I saw"*... **So Yes**, when we get to heaven→ **It** will be more than we can imagine-- **But** that shouldn't stop us from trying... **If you're familiar with Tolkein's book trilogy The Lord of the Rings: You're** probably aware of its Prequel entitled **"The Hobbit"** (The main character being Bilbo Baggins)... **& On** one occasion Bilbo & his journeying partners→ **Are** making their way through a



dark & scary forest... **& as Discouragement begins to set in: One** of his companions suggests that Bilbo climb a tree→ **In hopes** to get an idea of where they were / **& To See** just how close they might be to finally getting out... **So, he climbs a large tree: & Finally** gets above the forest canopy... **& There** he sees a brilliant blue sky→ **As** the Sun begins to warm him... **& There** he found his fears evaporating→ **& Increased** strength for the journey-- **B/C** he got above all the hardness of life below / **& Got** a glimpse of what was beyond... **That's Why (you see) God gives** us glimpses of heaven→ **B/C** He doesn't want us settling for this fallen world... **Our Identity isn't determined by our History→ But by our Destiny...** **Where** you've Been isn't who you are→ **Where** you're Going is who you are... **"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ-- set your sights on the reality of heaven→ Where Christ sits at God's place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thought→ & Do not think only about things down here on earth"**

**I would like to end on a Personal Note: Earlier in this series,** I mentioned (in passing) that one of my primary motives for wanting to do this series→ **Was for My Parents...** **Well,** I had a few people ask me about what I meant by that→ **& So** let me tell you... **This year, both my parents will have turned 80 years old: & While** I can tell you happily that they are both in excellent shape→ **I know** that the possibility of threatening health issue is increasing... **My dad** often reflects out loud how many of those who are among their peers have passed away... **In fact,** for decades my mother and father have hosted an annual reunion→ **For** a special group friendships they forged way back in high school... **& the** past few Reunions have been noted by their dwindling numbers... **& I guess** it's these kind experiences in life→ **That remind** us that we (too) are in the last stages of our journey here on earth... **& Isn't it true** that as we come to the close of any journey→ **The** destination becomes more important to us / **& more** in focus?... **& So,** I wanted to do this for them→ **To** give them Hope... **But also for you: I**

guess it's somewhat like **Luke** who wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts for a person he knew named Theophilus... **But, although written to a specific person:** We all are invited to look over Luke's shoulder→ & receive the benefits from it too... **& So, if you have found** some joy & encouragement from listening in on this→ **I'm** glad.