

Home

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 0 0] The other day I was reading a book with our two-year-old, Emmy, and that was a neat little book. It had pictures of places and pictures of animals and creatures, and what you had to do with the book was to take each picture of an animal, and you had to match the animal with the correct picture of the animal's home.

The idea being that each kind of animal has a specific home that is designed just for that animal to meet all of its needs where it will be completely comfortable.

And as I was reading this book with her, I found myself thinking, what if this book had a picture of a human being in it? What would the picture of home look like?

Revelation chapters 21 and 22. We've been in a long study of this masterful, amazing, sometimes baffling work of the Apostle John through the inspiration of the Spirit, and at last we come to Revelation 21 and 22.

As Ellen so beautifully read, this gives us a description of a vast city. But it's a city unlike anything we've ever seen.

[1 : 1 4] It goes beyond anything we can really imagine. It's almost the size of Australia. It has jewel-encrusted walls that stand 1,500 miles high.

By comparison, Mount Everest is 5.5 miles high. We can barely survive being on the summit of that mountain. These walls stand 1,500 miles high.

It's a city far greater than anything human beings have ever produced, anything we will ever produce. It's beyond all imagining.

It makes New York City look like a Lego set. But the most amazing thing about this city is that it shows us in highly symbolic language, and if we were first century Christians steeped in Old Testament imagery, the descriptions would make a lot more sense.

But it shows us through highly symbolic language what our true home really looks like. In other words, this world is not our true home.

[2 : 2 4] It sometimes looks like it. It sometimes feels like it. But it's not our true home. The picture that we are meant to be matched with is the New Jerusalem.

And so what we're going to do is we're going to spend some time this morning looking at this home, this true home, and trying to understand why it's so perfectly suited for us as human beings.

Let's pray, and then we'll dive in. Lord, we thank You for Your Word. And every week, it's so tempting to put Your Word down on the table, on the dissecting table, and to begin to take it apart piece by piece, to analyze it, to scrutinize it.

But Lord, we know that what we most need this morning is to be the ones on the table. We need to sit under Your Word. We need Your Word to analyze us, to scrutinize us, to open up our hearts, to reveal to us those deep places where we most need light and truth and love and grace.

And as we open Your written Word, Lord, we pray that by the power of Your Spirit, we would come face to face with Your living Word, Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So, the first thing we see about this home as we look at some of the great themes of these chapters is this.

[3 : 53] Home is a place where creation is renewed. All creation is renewed. In chapter 21, verse 5, it says, He who is seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

And notice He says, Not, I am making all new things. Right? Which has been a very prevalent belief, especially in the evangelical church over the last century or so.

The idea that God's going to scrap this world. It's going to all burn up in fire. And that God's going to make all new things. That's not what it says. It says, I make all things new.

Right? In this world, all things break down. All things decay. It's the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, which says that everything from the most distant galaxies spiraling through space to your body as it sits here in these pews, that everything is winding down.

Everything is breaking down. Across the universe, order is slowly returning to chaos. And as we wrestle with this reality that everything is slowly breaking down, it occurs to me that if this is all there is, if we are an accident of atoms, and we come into existence as a conscious, sentient being for a few decades, but we are doomed to break down and to return to dust, if that's all there is, it seems like after all this time of being human beings on the earth, we would have gotten used to the idea.

[5 : 46] That we would have come to terms with our fate and our destiny. If there's no God and no world beyond this one, we should have accepted that by now. And you know, the atheist Richard Dawkins tries to dress this whole idea up a bit.

He tries to infuse it with some sense of beauty. He offers a eulogy to his mentor, and in that eulogy he describes the man's body decaying and being consumed, and then living on as a swarm of insects buzzing through the forest.

And with this imagery, he's trying to take this old pagan myth that you find in all the old ancient religions, this idea of the cycle of life. He's trying to imbue that with some sense of wonder and beauty, trying to make it somehow comforting.

But I somehow doubt that idea would comfort a mother who's just buried her baby. You know, I think there's something deep in the human heart that screams defiantly in the face of death.

You know, like the poet Dylan Thomas, you know, half drunk and full of fire, crying out, do not go gently into that gentle night, but rage, rage against the dying of the light.

[7 : 09] Do not go gentle into that good night, rage, rage against the dying of the light. I think in our hearts, we know what we should believe based on what science tells us, and yet there's something deep down that says, no, there has to be more, because this is wrong.

And our true home is the place where all things are made new. Our true home is a place where entropy is reversed. Our true home is a place where death itself is undone, where God passes judgment on death.

It doesn't belong here anymore. It's a place where there's no crying or mourning or pain for the former things have passed away. So the first question I have for you is this, why would we rage against the dying of the light unless we were made for a home where the light never dies, where life never ends, and we have some primal memory, deeply buried, that that's where we belong.

So home is a place where all creation is renewed. Another thing we see about our true home is this, home is the place where longings are satisfied. Longings are satisfied.

You know, I think we all have a kind of gnawing, thirst, a kind of restlessness, an angst that can't be satisfied in this life.

[8 : 37] Now if you look inside and you say, well, I don't feel any sense of that longing or that angst, I would suggest that that's probably because most of us, including me, spend most of our time anesthetized.

And we're so numb that we have no idea that longing is there. You know, food and drink and sex and ambition and smartphones and social media and news feeds and shopping and vacations and busy work, anesthesia, all of it, all meant to keep us comfortably numb.

But there are moments in life where you come fully awake. Right? There's that moment after you've finally gotten your dream job where you begin to see behind the curtain and you begin to realize that it's not nearly as ideal as you thought it was going to be.

In fact, you kind of wish you were back in your old job. And you don't know what to do with those feelings. You know, and you think, maybe I wasn't looking for a new job.

Maybe there was something deeper that I was actually trying to satisfy. Maybe it wasn't the job. Maybe it wasn't the geographic cure. Maybe it wasn't moving to a new home or a new state. Maybe there's something deeper.

[9 : 52] You know, there's that, the times that, you know, you've fallen for somebody and you've given yourself to them and you've slept with them and then they stop returning your calls. They stop returning your texts.

You know, and you say, that feeling that I had, that this was everything. What do I do with the fact that I've now been abandoned? What do I do with the fact that I've given myself to somebody who is gone?

And you begin to realize, well, maybe I wasn't, maybe I wasn't really looking for that person. Maybe there was something under that that was driving me. Maybe there was a deeper need and I was confusing it with my romantic desire.

There are these moments where we begin to get, the dimmest sense that there is something down deep in our hearts, a longing that can't be satisfied.

And you know, some people simply refuse to accept that. Some people insist on finding all of their satisfaction here in this world. They insist on making this world home.

[10 : 56] And you know, verse 8 talks about the cowardly and the faithless and the detestable and the murderers and we sort of wince at this list. It sounds somehow pejorative.

But here's what we need to understand about this list. These are people who have become nothing more than their appetites. Right?

The person who craved safety above all else and chose self-preservation above all else, eventually that person has become cowardice, incarnate.

They don't know how to stand for anything. They only know how to close up and wait out the storm. Right? The person who craved revenge above all else has eventually become murder incarnate.

They can't escape that deep resentment and scorn and anger and it has consumed them. And you know, God does honor human choice.

[12 : 01] If we spend our entire lives saying, I am nothing without this thing I desire. I am nothing without this thing that I long for. God will one day say to us, have it your way.

Spend eternity as nothing but that desire. I think it helps the image of an unquenchable lake of fire make a little more sense. The unquenchable fire of unmet desires, longings that were never satisfied, thirst that will never be quenched.

But then there are the people who realize the truth as C.S. Lewis put it, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

People who realize that if we trust Jesus with our unmet desires, if we bring them to Him and say, I don't know what to do with this, but you do and I trust you, that He will one day bring us home.

And that is the place where all of our longings will finally be satisfied. You know, we see a river where we can come and drink freely. We see an image of a great wedding celebration where all of humanity is united with God like a bride to a groom.

[13 : 26] And we're meant to draw from this not only with our physical longings be satisfied, like hunger and thirst, but our deeper desires, maybe even our more painful desires, our emotional, psychological, spiritual longings.

No more hunger and thirst, no more loneliness, no more rejection, no more isolation, no more alienation.

Only the joy of knowing and being known, loving and being loved by the one who made us. A river and a wedding, right?

Drinking from the water of life and drinking from the limitless intimacy that we were made to experience with God and one another. So my second question is this, why would we have unquenchable longings that can't be satisfied in this world unless we were made for another world?

Unless this is not our home, unless there is some other world where we will truly be at home. The third thing that we see about our true home is this.

[14 : 37] Our true home is the place where all of our work is fulfilled or where all of our work finds its fulfillment. You know, the Bible tells us that all human beings were made to work.

We were made to work. You know, we need to be productive in our lives. We need to be generative. We need to be creating. We need to be cultivating. We need to be making things happen.

And what we know psychologically is that if we don't do that, that we stagnate. And eventually, we not only stagnate, we die. You have to get up out of bed and go do in the world.

It's how you were made. And yet, our work is also filled with frustration and futility. And I don't have to convince you of that. You know that.

The Bible says this is because our world is under a curse. You know, human beings rebelled against God and one of the ramifications of that is that when we go to work, we have to contend with thorns and thistles and hard soil.

[15 : 42] Now, what's that all about? What does that look like since most of us are not in agricultural trades? What does that look like? Well, it looks like a few things. It looks like this. No matter what we build, it will always fall apart.

Right? The greatest ancient architectural wonders from past centuries are now either dust or tourist traps.

And somebody else has come along and built something on top. Names of buildings change. Everything crumbles. Futility also means that we will always be able to envision more than we can ever actually accomplish.

Now, what a cruel joke that is. Oh, so painful. You know, you think of the Habsburg court composer Antonio Salieri, painfully insecure, knowing deep down that his work is only mediocre.

And then you think of him hearing the music of this no-name, impoverished guy named Mozart. And in that moment, realizing that he will never be able to match that.

[16 : 56] it also means that our work is going to be subject to forces outside of our control. You know, you deal with a frustrating, impossible boss.

You have a meaningful collaboration with somebody and then they stab you in the back. You're doing the best you can, your team is doing the best they can, your boss is doing the best they can, but you work within a broken bureaucracy.

You're a dented, bent cog in a gigantic, creaky machine. Laying it on thick.

And you realize it's outside of your control. Thorns and thistles and hard soil mean that you will never achieve perfection. You'll never achieve perfection. perfection.

I'm told a story from Kaylee on our team in Brussels. In the town square there is the town hall and the town hall is this masterpiece of Gothic architecture.

[18 : 07] But as the story goes, the architect, upon completion of this massive, beautiful structure, realized when looking at it that the front door was off center of his life's work.

So he climbed to the top of the tower and threw himself off to his death. Life was no longer worth living. Now, whether or not that story is true, apparently there's a star on the spot where he landed.

I don't know, you can go check it out. But regardless of whether the story is true, the point still stands. Our work will always be off center. We'll always have to contend with that.

Perfection is not possible in this world. And in the face of such futility, I think people go one of two directions. People either double down and they become workaholics.

If I try harder, if I work longer hours, maybe I can overcome the futility. I think other people eventually check out. They get so cynical and so burned out from butting up against things that they have no control over that they just sort of check out.

[19 : 15] And they slide into some job that they can do with half their brain turned off. And they anesthetize themselves and they sort of go through life from pleasure to pleasure, escape to escape, but their job no longer has any real meaning.

In the face of such futility, it's hard to imagine continuing in a life of work. That is, unless we realize that our work was actually made for another world. Right?

Verse 26, it's this amazing reference. A great processional brings all of the glory and the honor of the nations through the gates of the New Jerusalem to become a part of the architecture of the New Jerusalem.

This is an amazing image. The work of human hands and the work of God's hands joined together as one. All of the things that we strive for, all of the effort that we put into it, joined with God who can overcome obstacles, who can achieve perfection.

It's the completion of all human endeavor. Because in the New Jerusalem, the curse has finally been lifted. We'll no longer be able to envision more than we can imagine.

[20 : 27] In fact, every day we will see more than we ever dreamed possible. There's that wonderful little story from J.R.R. Tolkien, Leaf by Niggle, that I think parallels his own life in many ways.

Niggle is an artist in a society that does not appreciate art. I mean, that's pretty tragic. And he's an artist who has this vision of a tree in his mind.

He's possessed by this vision and he's obsessed with trying to bring it about. And so he spends his whole life trying to paint this tree perfectly, but distractions take him away and futility thwarts him at every turn.

And so he spends his whole life trying to paint the tree in his mind only to die and to have his unfinished painting abandoned, largely forgotten, even at one point used to patch a leaky roof.

And then after his death, Niggle finds himself in a beautiful countryside. And he begins to realize with amazement that this is the land of his vision.

[21 : 36] And then he looks and he sees the tree. But this isn't just a painting. It's the real thing.

The question is this, why would we be able to dream such fantastic dreams unless they might be realized in another world? Maybe we're not dreaming about this world. Maybe we're dreaming about the world that we are meant for.

By the way, this is the great gift that artists give us. Because they, more than anyone else, they, more than anyone else, are able to help us imagine what is possible.

And you name it, it is possible in the New Jerusalem. So our true home is a place where creation is renewed.

It's a place where longings are satisfied. It's a place where our work finally finds its fulfillment, its completion. The glory that we may have desired here is actually meant for Him.

[22 : 42] The fourth and final thing we see about this true home is that this is the place where humanity is restored. Our humanity. Everyone I know wants world peace.

Everyone I know wants world peace. But in spite of the myth of progress, we seem no closer to peace today than we were a thousand years ago. I think our own country feels more politically and racially divided than ever.

The problem is I think people have said that in every generation. Revelation 22 verse 2 shows us the tree of life which sits in the heart of the city.

And it says that the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations which is a beautiful image. And earlier in Revelation we're told that the new Jerusalem will be a place where people from every tribe and tongue and nation are joined together in the worship of Christ.

Right? So the leaves aren't just for the healing of our nation or our nation and the nations that we happen to like. It's for the healing of all of the nations because the purpose of the gospel was always to go out to every tribe tongue and nation to gather people from every corner of the earth together as one.

[24 : 01] And so the new Jerusalem like any city is multi-ethnic it's multicultural it's multilingual but unlike any other city all humanity is unified. So you have perfect unity and perfect diversity together.

Remember at Pentecost that miracle we read about in Acts chapter 2 the birth of the church when God pours His Holy Spirit out on His people in fulfillment of ancient promises.

And remember what happens when the Spirit is poured out. It does not say and everyone began speaking the same language. Everyone became of the same culture.

The true miracle of Pentecost is that everybody hears the gospel in their own language. In fact there was never a time in the history of the church when it was not multilingual.

There was never a time in the history of the church when it was not multicultural multi-ethnic. This has always been the reality of God's church and we see why. Because God's desire is that the greatest most glorious most beautiful artifacts from all the cultures and ethnicities and languages around the world that all of that would adorn the new Jerusalem.

[25 : 13] That it would all become a part of the glory of our true home. It's intentional. The new Jerusalem is a place where all people will live together in peace. I love Zechariah's description of it.

He says this will be a place where the streets of the city shall be filled with the sounds of children playing. If you look at the larger reference he says old men and women will sit in the streets.

You can imagine them sitting in benches and talking and you'll hear the sounds of children playing. In other words it's a great place to grow old in.

It's a great place to grow up in. It's the kind of city we all wish we could live in. It's our true home. And you have all of humanity gathered around the light and the warmth of God himself who by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has finally made peace not only between humans and himself but also between humans and one another.

He's made reconciliation possible so that he can finally be the God who dwells in the midst of his people all of his people. So the fourth question is this why would we long for peace unless we were made for a world where all humanity lives together as one?

[26 : 29] Right so this is what our true home is like. This is a place where creation is renewed. This is a place where longings are satisfied. It's a place where work is fulfilled.

It's a place where humanity is restored. And the reason that we're saying all this to kind of bring all this home is that the aim of all human life is to find our way home.

The aim of all human life is to find our way to this city. You know it reminds me of Bob Goff who tells this story of himself and a few friends participating in a trans-Pacific sailing race which is a pretty big deal.

I'm not a sailor but I can imagine this would be quite challenging. And Goff says that he and his friends were woefully underprepared for this undertaking but they set out anyway on this trans-Pacific race and he says they get lost numerous times they take all kinds of twists and turns they have to do course correction after course correction he says it's at times brutal and exhausting and then they finally make it to port they finally make it home in the early hours of the morning and Goff talks about his boat finally pulling into the marina they're all exhausted and he says that the silence is broken by a booming voice over a loud speaker it's a tradition in this race that whenever a boat makes it home no matter if it's two or three o'clock in the morning that this old announcer same guy who's been doing it for decades announces the boat and announces all of the crew members and so they're sailing in and this announcer voice booms out and it says then he started announcing the names of our ragtag crew like he was introducing heads of state he didn't tell everyone we didn't know which way was north or about all the other mess ups instead he just welcomed us in from the adventure like a proud father would when he was done there was a pause and then in a sincere voice his last words to the entire crew were these friends it's been a long trip welcome home the point is

I think that one day for those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ I think we're going to have such words spoken over us as we enter the gates of the new Jerusalem and the reason I'm telling you all of this is so that I can ask you this question what is the aim of your life what's the aim of your life what is your life aiming at are you aiming only at the things of this world are you aiming only at this present reality or are you aiming beyond this world to our true home and I would say that this is maybe the most important question of your life are you off course in your aim have you lost a sense of true north if that's true then now is the time for a course correction now is the time to come to Jesus and to ask his forgiveness and to give your life to him and to ask him to set you back on course if you aim only at this world if you live like there's nothing beyond this world your life is never going to make sense you're going to rage against death you're going to have longings that you can't satisfy you're going to dream dreams that can't be fulfilled and it's never going to make sense but more than that if you aim only at this world and this is counterintuitive if you are aiming only at this world then you will actually be of very little use to this world you won't be very useful the reason is simple this world needs people of hope this world needs people of undying unquenchable hope you know people who can face suffering and death with hope people who can bear the weight of unmet longings with hope people who can work in long difficult often thankless jobs with hope people who can do the hard grueling long term work of peacemaking and bridge building and reconciliation and never lose hope that's what the world needs and it's the promise of a home in the future that gives us hope for this home in the present and this is why we are here by the way as Church of the

[31 : 17] Advent this is why we exist because we want to be people of hope in Washington D.C. for Washington D.C. we want to seek the flourishing of the city we want to push back the chaos and the darkness until Jesus comes again because we know that when Jesus comes again he is the one who will make all things new and then he will wipe away every tear he will wipe away every tear and he will say to each of us friends it's been a long trip welcome home let's pray Lord we desire to be people of hope but not just an earthly hope we long we long for a supernatural hope an inexplicable hope we long to drink from the deep well of your gospel that it might fill us with joy and hope and faith despite our circumstances promises and we pray that this hope sourced in you would not just be for us but that it would be a blessing to the city that it would be a blessing to our neighbors that it would be a blessing to our families that it would be a blessing to the places where we work that it would be a blessing to all of those we come in contact with that this would be a place that is a wellspring of hope because we have our eyes fixed on our true home we pray this not only for our good or the good of this city but because it will glorify you because one day the greatest accomplishments in Washington

D.C. will pale in comparison to the walls of that city and all of the glory that we might try to grab up here will all be given to you and it's in that desire in the name of your son Jesus Christ that we pray amen God bless you