

The World We All Want

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Date: 09 March 2025

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 01] Amazing, beautiful chapter of the Bible, which does lots of things for us, but it certainly is gonna do this for us, I think. It's gonna complete God's story of salvation.

So there's a story that runs all the way through the Bible, from creation and Genesis to new creation and revelation. And here we are going to find the great happily ever after that your heart and mind deep down longs for, of a universe reborn and made perfect, of paradise regained and restored, of a glorious reunion that lasts for all eternity.

Here too, we're gonna find a chapter that captures some of our deepest human longings. We're all different and we're all from different places, but there are certain things that we have in common. The desire for a love that is permanent.

The desire for a glorious home and a homecoming. And for a life that is truly satisfying. And we're gonna see in all of this that Christ Jesus is the key.

So the book of Revelation has kept on reminding us that Jesus is the one who died and then rose again, who returned to heaven and who will return one day. And now he's pictured in wonderful ways.

[1 : 18] He is the bridegroom who loves his bride. He is the one who prepares an eternal home for all of God's children.

And he is the one who supplies the life that satisfies. And so taken together, this chapter as we come towards the end of Revelation reminds us that our future as followers of Jesus is glorious. And it's glorious because he, Jesus, is glorious. I hope as well that as we get into some of the details of this chapter, it's gonna stir up certain emotions. Perhaps it's gonna stir up for us a sense of hope as we're being presented with a world of perfection, a world of perfect love.

Here is the world we all want. Here is the goal. But it might also, and this isn't necessarily a bad thing, it might stir up a sense of homesickness in us, especially as the people of God.

As we recognize that there is this world that we all want the way that we want it to be, but often don't we find it so different. And we struggle in the tension that life is not supposed to be like this, we often think.

[2 : 32] Difficulties in our relationships, difficulties and frustrations with work, in our health, even in our churches. But Jesus offers promise, he says, that when he comes back, that's when everything is made new.

Here is when we will enter into the life that we were made for. Here is where we will live forever in this world that we all want, when everything sad will forever come untrue. And remember that this book and these pictures are given in the first instance to help Christians who are struggling and who are suffering.

And it's a way for God to say to us, remember, it is all worth it. But maybe as we read this, maybe especially if you're not a Christian, you're new to church, you're thinking, is this too good to be true? Is this something that we can trust? Does it all sound a bit pie in the sky? And so it's really important before we get into the details to just consider who is speaking. In a way, this is very similar to what we said to the children.

Verses five and six, we have God seated on the throne saying, I am making everything new. He presents himself as the eternal, the almighty king. And it's this one who says, it is done.

[3 : 42] And it's this God who speaks truth from heaven, who invites us to come with our thirst and to be satisfied. He is the one who makes everything new and he invites us to listen in, to receive what he has for us.

So our plan this morning, we could spend forever on this. So this is a wonderful chapter. We're going to take three big themes. We're going to take the theme of the wedding and the home and the

garden. I think God's glory and the gospel is so good that he gives us different pictures and maybe our hearts will go to one or other of these this morning.

And we're going to think about how do they kind of speak to our longings and how does Jesus, the Savior, fulfill the story? How does Jesus bring us into this world that we all want?

So that ultimately, all of us, whoever we are, we would take the invitation to trust in Jesus, that we would be enjoying life with him today, looking ahead gladly for the promise of eternal life with him.

Okay, so we're going to do this very briefly. The first story that we see in our chapter is the story of a wedding in the first four verses of Revelation 21. And that takes us back to creation, Genesis 1 and 2.

[4 : 58] There was also a wedding. There was Adam and Eve. Remember that God gave a wife to the man. And he gave to them a marriage with a mission.

He said, here is your calling. Fill the earth, rule over the earth, spread the glory of God and enjoy life with me while you're doing it. But into that perfect picture came the devil, came the serpent.

Genesis chapter 3, into the marriage came sin. As the man and the woman disobey God, ultimately they want to replace God, to reject his rule.

And the moment that that happens and sin comes, relationships break down. They're now hiding from God. They feel a sense of shame together. There's blaming.

There's pain. There's the loss of the presence of God. But God comes and he calls to them. And even in that, it's a reminder that God desires to invite people again.

[6 : 01] He would have a people whom he loves. And that's the story of the Old Testament. See, if we go all the way towards the end of the Old Testament, we go to a prophet like Hosea. Hosea is a really dramatic book.

God says to Hosea, Hosea, I want your marriage to be like a picture of my relationship with Israel. Hosea was a good husband married to an unfaithful wife.

And God said, that's like my people. They commit spiritual adultery, turning to follow other gods, turning to make alliances with other kings. God was showing love and faithfulness, but again, the people of God turning their back.

It's a picture of the heart of sin. God offers us himself. God offers us love, but we turn our back because we want to be in charge. We think other things will satisfy. But God's purpose to have a people whom he will love and be with together forever does not fail in the end.

Look at chapter 21 of Revelation. We're reminded that this is new creation. I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first things have passed away. The world has been remade.

[7 : 09] The curse of sin is gone. There's no more sea. The sea is always a symbol of chaos and evil. So when sin and evil are done away with, there's going to be another wedding.

God again is going to give a wife. Look at verse 2. The holy city comes down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And God pronounces his blessing over this marriage.

God's dwelling place is now among the people. They will be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God. This is the goal of salvation, that God would live with his people in a perfect world forever.

And there's this wonderful picture of intimacy in this marriage that we have a Savior who is so good that he comes so near that he wipes every tear, that he removes everything that spoils.

No more sorrow, no more grief, no more death. The powerful King ensures that he will be with his bride made beautiful forever. Now what's the significance of this for you and me today?

[8 : 13] It's significant because we are made for relationship. All kinds of relationships. And they are a source of profound joy and happiness to us often.

Think about the picture of the passage. Some of us here will have had the joyful anticipation of being a bride waiting for the wedding day. And that sense of here is a love, here is a sense of permanence, here is a place of security.

But we also know in our relationships, disappointments, and griefs, and losses, and longing.

We know that death casts its shadow, that death always comes. But we are made for relationship, and most of all, we're made for relationship with God.

And the Bible says to us, the love that you and I long for, that we can spend maybe all our life looking for, it's found in God and in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 14] Here is a love that is eternal and unbreakable. Here is the one whose love never fails, who will never disappoint. Here is the promise of perfect and forever love in Jesus.

And that tells us that the Savior, Jesus, is so important to this story. And actually by God's design, Ephesians 5 tells us, every time we go to a wedding, every marriage that we see, speaks to us something of the gospel, speaks to us something of the relationship between Jesus and His church. A bridegroom is supposed to love, and to sacrifice, and to serve as a picture of what Jesus does for His bride, His people. There is union, and there is love, and there is joy, and there is safety. Now how does Jesus show His undying love and commitment to His bride, His people, the church? What we do in a wedding ceremony is we give wedding ring, but Jesus gives something much more.

He gives His own body. That it's the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross that is a sign of the covenant commitment of God to save and to love a people for Himself.

[10 : 30] And the Lord Jesus is such a wonderful bridegroom that He removes all the ugliness, all our sin, all our shame, and He clothes us with His perfect righteousness so that the church and all of our sin, in the end, we will be this radiant bride for Jesus.

And so the Savior invites us to look to Him, to trust Him, and to find that one love that never fails, that never disappoints.

That's one way of thinking about the story of the Bible. Here's the second way. It's the story of a home and a homecoming. This is a kind of a theme that runs through the rest of chapter 21.

But again, just to take us back to the beginning of God's story, in the beginning, God made the world and He made, He planted a garden called Eden. And this was a special place.

This was like a garden sanctuary because God came and God met with Adam and Eve there. And God planted Adam and Eve in that garden and it was a place of beauty and they had everything they needed and His glory was on full display.

[11 : 40] Imagine there, I don't know what your first home was like, but that was Adam and Eve's first home. And it was wonderful and it was wonderful because God was present. He would come, as it were, to walk with them and to talk with them.

And so they were to live their lives working and worshipping and resting and serving, loving and enjoying relationships with one another but with God in this true and beautiful home.

But if we know the story again, we know that they failed to look after that home. They failed to guard and keep it. And so again, the serpent, the snake, the devil came, temptation came, sin came, and the consequence was they were sent out of that home into exile.

But again, God's goal that He would be God with His people, that would continue. And key to this whole promise of God living with His people were a couple of different structures.

One was a tent called the tabernacle and one was a mighty building called the temple. But they were both in different ways sanctuaries, places where the God of glory lived among His people.

[12 : 52] So if you wanted to meet with God, to be with God, you had to go to this tent or you had to go to this temple. And in both the tabernacle and the temple, there was one particular room that was especially significant.

It was called the Holy of Holies. We're told the dimensions of this room. In the tabernacle, it was 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits.

It was a cube. By the time they were building the temple, it became 20 by 20 by 20. Okay, so there's this cube, this box. And once a year, one man, the high priest, could go in and meet with God and offer sacrifice.

And it was the job of the people to look after and to be holy around this home. But again, they would fail to guard and to keep. Instead, they would set up idols. They'd be half-hearted in their worship.

They'd be divided in their loyalty. And in the end, again, God's people would lose their home. And in the end, the prophets tell us that God's glory would depart. And so the story of the Bible, by the time we get to the end of the Old Testament before Jesus comes, the people of God are left with a longing.

[14 : 05] Will God return? Will God's glory return to His temple? Will take that with us into Revelation 21. As we recognize it in the new creation, hope becomes promise.

And here we find the people of God invited to an eternal home and an eternal homecoming. Look at verse 10. Here is the home for the people of God.

What do we know about it? It's the holy city comes down out of heaven from God. It shines with the glory of God. God's glory has got these 12 gates reminding us that the way of access is open because of Jesus, because of the gospel.

There's security. There's high walls. But there's also no fear of intruders, we're told later. There's nothing that's going to come and spoil. Nothing that's going to ruin this life that God has made with His people.

And so there is this great homecoming here within our text. In verse 12, who lives here, whose names are written on the gates, that say this is their home. Twelve tribes of Israel.

[15:10] Verse 12, that tells us all the Old Testament believers about their faith in God, that He would send as Messiah Jesus. They're going to be there. Verse 14, the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And so here's what this is saying. Everyone who believes in the message about Jesus, they're also going to find their home in here. So what started as a garden where Adam and Eve live with God now becomes this huge city where everybody who believes in Jesus across all time and countries and cultures gathers together, people from every nation and background united together in the presence of God in perfect love and joy.

We have found our true forever home in these pages, and God is wonderfully present. So we talked a little bit about the dimensions of the Holy of Holies.

Now pay attention to verse 16, and it explains why we get the numbers here. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide.

He measured the city with the rod and found it to be twelve thousand stadia in length and as wide and as high as it is long. Here's the symbolism.

[16:33] The new creation, like a massive cube. And the point of that is to say to us that the God of glory will fill the whole earth and God's people will live forever in the true Holy of Holies.

We will never be a moment outside of the perfect presence of God. We will enjoy life with our God forever. We too will work and worship and rest and serve and love and enjoy and God will be there always.

This isn't just for one person once per year. This is for everybody who puts their trust in Jesus for all of eternity. Now what's the significance of this theme?

Home, even just to say the word home, can have really powerful associations for us, can't it? For some it connects us with places.

Often it connects us with the people that we love. At its best, home is associated with warm welcome, a place of true belonging, a place where we feel secure and we feel joy.

[17:41] It's the world we want. But in part, home and homecoming is such a powerful image because we know this to be true that we live among the ruin.

Most days of the week our church is open so that asylum seekers can come and they can learn English. What does home mean to them if you have to flee from persecution and war?

But to take it closer to home for ourselves, many of us here today, I imagine, have lived at different points with a sense of homesickness. This isn't your home country.

Even if it is your home country, sometimes you perhaps wish you were where your parents were or where your friends were. In a city like Edinburgh, it's really easy to be surrounded by people but yet to feel like a stranger.

There is a real problem of loneliness in our own city. The idea of home can bring mixed emotions for us. It can be a castle for us.

[18:45] At times it can be a prison for us. Where do we find our true home? Where do we find that warm, loving welcome?

Where do we find those arms that are open to welcome us into true belonging, to bring us into a place where love and joy will be unbroken? And the answer again is from Jesus.

To think about the story of Jesus, he is the eternal son of God but he entered into history, leaving his true home of heaven to come down, to be born on this earth, to be God with us, to be the true temple actually.

So he would say that so that now if we want to meet with God, we go to Jesus. If we want to encounter the glory of God, we need to go to Jesus. And Jesus gave that wonderful promise in John 14.

Just before he was about to die, he says, I'm going to prepare a place for you. My father's house has many rooms and I'm going to go and I'm going to make a room ready and one day I'll come back and I'll take you to be with me, that you may be where I am.

[19 : 59] Jesus prepares an eternal home for his people by going to the cross to die in our place for our sin before rising again and going back to rule in heaven for us.

Jesus went into exile for us, went into the far country, on the cross felt forsaken by his father.

So if we turn from sin to trust in Jesus, we can be brought home to God so that we will live for all eternity in the true holy of holies and that involves a tearing.

Mark's gospel does something really helpful for us. It tells us that when Jesus was dying on the cross and his body was torn as a loving sacrifice, over there in the temple the curtain was torn and the curtain was torn so that the glory of God would break out and begin to fill the earth so that now God comes to dwell in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls all around the world and the church continues to grow.

The good news of Jesus spreads to the ends of the earth and that process of filling the earth with glory that will be completed at the new creation. That's the home that we were made for and Jesus invites us to come home to God to enjoy that glory and that love to have that home and that homecoming that will never end and as Christian pilgrims we're invited every day to remember that's our true home so that we would keep the faith that we would go through the struggles knowing that we will make it home because we are connected to Jesus.

[21 : 57] So we thought about the wedding we thought about the home now we need to think very briefly about the garden and we sort of talked about the garden but the imagery really picks up in Revelation 21 22 rather but again to go back to creation Genesis 1 and 2 we have this paradise garden made by God and within the garden there are those rivers that flow to give life to irrigate the land and in the centre of the garden there was this tree known as the tree of life reminding us that God is a generous giver what he wants to give is life but there was another tree in the centre of the garden and it was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Adam and Eve were told you have this whole garden and I'm saying yes to you enjoying this whole garden there's one tree that I want you to say no to it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil it was forbidden that was their test of obedience but they failed that test and when they failed the test again they were expelled from the garden and they lost access to that tree and the entrance to the garden was now guarded by an angel with a fiery sword but there's still that longing for life and for satisfaction the prophets again would pick up these themes

Jeremiah is one very early on in his prophecy he said this to them in chapter 2 my people this is God speaking have committed two sins they have forsaken me and listen to how he pictures himself the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns broken cisterns what's his point God is saying I'm offering to give myself to my people and that's everything that's true and lasting satisfaction but his people in the Old Testament were searching for life and satisfaction meaning in all the wrong places and they were coming up empty another prophet Ezekiel in chapter 47 has this glorious image he sees a renewed temple and underneath the temple there's a stream that starts to flow and as the stream continues to flow it gets wider and it gets deeper till it becomes this roaring river and whenever the river goes life goes and this is the picture of this is what God does this is what God gives he is the one who gives life true life now pick up your Bible and look at Revelation 22 verse 1 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 it is the symbol of life giving refreshing water that comes from God God is a fountain God is never thirsty he has perfect satisfaction in himself but he overflows his goodness his beauty his truth his love to us in our thirst look at verse 2 and 3 down the middle of the great street okay on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing 12 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 here's a return of the tree of life here is a symbol of God's generosity and God's provision I will give you perfect life and I will give it to you in relationship with me and there is a constant supply of this perfect life that is healing and not just for some but for all peoples from all nations because the invitation runs wide and the high point of life in this garden is that once again

God is here the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city so it's a garden city and his servants will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads this is the happily ever after this is God and his people in the garden become a city together forever seeing

the face of Jesus basking in the glory of God belonging to him forever there's no more darkness there's no more night there's no more danger there's no need for the sun because we get to live and join the light of God's glory and we serve him and we reign with him forever this is the life that we were made for and the significance of this I think comes when we acknowledge that all of us in different ways we have a thirst a thirst sometimes for meaning and purpose a thirst for work or for life that satisfies a longing to find our ultimate hopes met so our hearts can be at peace but often don't we discover that our hearts come up empty that we often find that our hearts remain restless speaking to a friend this week who'd gone on what sounded like it should have been the trip of a lifetime to Japan taking in the wonders of Disneyland

Tokyo some people that'd be the best thing ever and she came away thinking is that it long cues and silly Mickey Mouse ears that's often our experience in this life we imagine this is the thing this is the one my heart's gonna find my everything here and if that's not God we're gonna come up empty God is a generous giver and the greatest gift he gives is himself that's what the book of Revelation tells us and that takes us again to Jesus the saviour who will speak in the gospels to a woman in John chapter 4 beside a well she is thirsty she is longing to find security to find relationship to find love and Jesus says to her I can give you living water that will spring up to eternal life Jesus makes the bold amazing statement that he is God and he gives the life that satisfies now how does he do that how does he give us the access to the tree of life well the Bible tells us of another tree the cross of Calvary and there as we as we pan to that mountain to that tree we see Jesus as it were going under the fiery sword of God's judgment not for anything that he had done wrong but as he bears the sin of his people as he takes our day as he is cut off so that you and I could be forgiven and brought near and enter life with God we hear Jesus cry on the cross

[28 : 43] I am thirsty as he becomes the sacrifice so that you and I can taste and see that the Lord is good that we can enjoy the goodness of God in this life with a certain hope of eternal joy in the life to come so here is the world we all want truly the life that we were made for to be brought into this wonderful story of God's commitment to be with his people to let his glory overflow to us to invite us into perfect life with him and this story creates a thirst in us and I hope it says to all of us I want to go deeper not to be too easily satisfied I want to find true love in knowing God I want to find my true home in him and to find that joyful life that will never end and wonderfully we're also reminded who's the great hero of this story it's the Lord Jesus for us to have our happily ever after Jesus has come to defeat our great enemies he has come to rescue and win a bride for himself he is the one who will return one day to take his people to his glorious home forever this is the world we all want come to him trust him and live