

Great Gift: The Gift We All Long For

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[0 : 00] a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe 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. And if you just flick over to chapter 22, starting at verse 1, down to 6.

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. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. The angel said to me, These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.

Thanks. And there is a pen or a piece of paper with headings and questions, if that helps you. As we look at these great passages, really chapter 21 and chapter 22 cover all one theme, but we're just going to be looking at a section of each.

[2 : 30] Okay, well, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your many gifts to us, gifts that we have already enjoyed today, the gift of friendship, gift of family, being able to talk and share with one another, the gift of the Lord Jesus, and the power of your Holy Spirit at work within us.

We thank you so much. Lord, we thank you for your time.

that we would live lives full of meaning, of hope and purpose, that we would be the answer, not ourselves, but the message we bring to so many who are lost and without hope.

So encourage us all this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, over the last week, we had our annual What Do You Want for Christmas conversation.

[4 : 22] I don't know if you have that in your house. We do. Requests came flooding in. PS4, iPhone, 42-inch smart TV, sports gear, food, and that's just Kirsty's wish list.

By the time we'd finished our conversation, it had turned into a lot of shouting, threats of not getting anything, a long explanation from Dad about household budgets and recession, and on and on it went.

So what do you want for Christmas? What's on your wish list? And I don't mean what gadget do you want, or what new fashion accessory that you're after.

I mean, what do you really long for? What's your deepest heart's desire?

Because I think the things that we desperately want is what everybody wants. Deep, caring, loving friendships.

[5 : 38] People who are loyal and faithful. Relationships that have been broken, but now made new and put right.

Homes where there is joy and happiness, where there isn't any fighting or arguing. Where sickness is healed and all suffering has been removed.

Equality, so that homeless people don't die in the cold. Justice, so that guilty people are punished, whatever their political position.

We want an end to things like wars and famine and natural disasters. You see, what we really long for, what we really want, is for everything that is broken to be fixed.

We want a new world. A world where people are happy and never sad. A world where there is peace and not violence. A world where everyone is satisfied and fulfilled.

[6 : 57] Is that too much of a thing to ask for? Is that too much of a wish? Well, what we all want for Christmas, these big longings and big desires of our hearts, have all been promised by the risen Lord Jesus.

And that's what we have in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. We're given this spectacular vision to help us see and visualize what has been promised.

This vision is like a collage of colorful pictures that all flow and mingle together to show us. To show us the beauty and the wonder of a new world under God and what it's going to be like.

So let's have a look at this vision. First, a gift is promised. A new world. Look at verse 1 of chapter 21.

John, who sees the vision, writes, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first earth and the first heaven had passed away.

[8 : 15] Everything, he says, is going to be changed. There's going to be a complete transformation in the world that we know. There's a program on television called At Your Service.

It's about two brothers, Francis and John Brennan, who own hotels down in Kerry. And they offer their services to help small hotels who are struggling, near bankruptcy, and need an urgent makeover.

And they come into these small hotels. They change the menus and the catering arrangements. They change the decor in the lobby. They refurbish the bedrooms, put on new wallpaper, put in new furniture.

They change the whole business plan of the hotel. They even remove unhealthy and lazy staff. The end result is a complete transformation.

A new order has been put in place. Well, what these brothers do for a small hotel, God is going to do on a cosmic scale for this universe in which we live.

[9 : 32] Look at the end of verse 4. He says, The old order of things has passed away. He who is seated on the throne, that is, the risen Lord Jesus, said, I am making everything new.

It's hard to get our minds around it. This world that we live in, made new.

So what's this new world going to look like? Well, in these couple of texts, we have seven pictures, or I've broken it into seven pictures, to help us see what this new world is like.

First, there's the removal of fear. I wonder what it is that you do fear in life. Do you fear people? Are you afraid of the future?

Maybe of dying? Well, in this new world, there is nothing to fear because all fear has been removed. Look at the little phrase at the end of verse 1 of chapter 21.

[10 : 43] There's that little phrase that says, There was no longer any sea. Now, when John wrote this in the first century, the sea was a sign of threat.

We tend to think of the sea as a place of pleasure and recreation. But in John's day, there were no yachts, there were no jet skis flying about the place. For them, the sea was not a safe place to go out to.

It was dangerous. People lost their lives when they went out to sea. But here the picture is of no more sea. Not literally.

It's not that this new world, you're not going to have any sea. There will be a sea. But it's symbolically, he's meaning, there is no longer any fear. All the fear has been removed.

There is not fear from anyone or anything. All fear gone. That's the kind of world we want. Second, there's the provision of security.

[11 : 48] Verse 2. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Jerusalem, we know, was the capital city, the centre of power and authority.

This is where the king lived and where the king ruled. So it was a place of provision, a place of protection. People came into the city to escape trouble and hardship.

They came to the city to find rest. Well, here we're given a picture that this new world is going to be like a fortified city. Safe and secure.

No threat or danger or harm. A city of freedom and joy. A place without worry or concern. This is the kind of world we all long for.

The third picture that we get is of the presence of God in this place. Verse 3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them.

[13:01] They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. Now we all enjoy friendships and relationships.

But this is the ultimate relationship that we were made for. This is why God created us. That we would be made for him and to be with him.

This is where we are finally satisfied and fulfilled. The God who made the universe in all his power. Who is rich in mercy, full of justice, faithful in love, gentle and compassionate.

It tells us that we will be with him. We will live with him. And he will be with us. We will see him. It will be like the coming together of a husband and wife in all its beauty and intimacy.

Look at the end of verse 2 where it talks about the new Jerusalem, the city coming down prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

[14:06] This coming together, this unity with God that we will never be separated. This permanent relationship. In this new world, we will be with God.

Get our minds around it that we will see him and we will live with him and talk to him in ways that we have never known before. The presence of God.

And in this place, there will be the absence of suffering. Verse 4. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Every one of us here has experienced some kind of pain and suffering.

Sometimes it's through our own illness. Sometimes it's through the sickness of someone we love.

And it's painful when somebody suffers because most of the time we just can't do anything about it.

[15:09] We can't fix it. And sadly, all suffering results in death. And none of us like death because it ends everything that is good.

It steals away our friends and our family. It spoils and robs us of our joy and our happiness. And when those we love closest to us we grieve the heartache the loneliness and it never ever seems to go away.

But look at the picture here in verse 4. In this new world there is no more suffering. There is no more death. No more hospitals to visit.

No more funerals to attend. Look at the next picture. Not only is there the absence of suffering but there is the abundance of life.

Look at chapter 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 down the middle of the great street of the city.

[16:30] Here we have this river this water of life. It pictures the abundance of life that there will be. Life itself will be flowing flowing from the very source from God's throne right down through the city to the people of God.

A continuous stream that nourishes and provides and sustains all things. We live in a world where death is at work where death destroys and disease corrupts but in this new world there will be life and it will change and transform everything.

On each side the rest of verse 2 of the river stood the tree of life bearing 12 crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month.

This river of life in all its bountifulness produces a tree of life which is there for all the people to feed from and to enjoy and notice the way this tree is.

It produces fruit every month. It's never ending in its supply of goodness. It pictures this abundance and plenty that there will be. People in this new world will never be thirsty.

[17:49] They will never be hungry. Everything they need for is provided. But more than that look at the rest of verse 2. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

I'm sure you've all had a nettle sting at some stage and you're all told to get a little dock leaf rub it on your arm until the sting goes away.

I don't know if it ever did but that's what we were told to do. Well here we're told something that is true. the leaves of this tree will bring full and complete healing.

It's giving us a picture of what God is going to do. All the emotional scars that people carry. All the physical hurts from our lives.

The mental wounds. The spiritual pain. It's all healed. It's all rubbed away. never to break us or crush us again.

[19 : 01] This is abundant life renewed and restored to what it should be. And I guess picturing all of these things together we're told in verse 3 that the curse is lifted.

No longer will there be any curse. because the world that we live in and that we experience right now is under a curse.

That's why things break. That's why relationships go wrong. Because of our rebellion against God. Because of our sinful actions and our hard hearts. Life doesn't function the way it's meant to.

There's a frustration about life. It's damaged and broken. We don't enjoy work as we should. We don't enjoy the things around us as we should because things have gone wrong.

But in this new world the curse has been lifted. It's been taken away. Life is given its freedom to be able to flourish. Instead of death and disease there will be beauty and harmony.

[20 : 12] And in this world we will also flourish. We will be everything that God intends us to be. Look at the rest of verse three. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants that's his people will serve him.

They will be working. They will see his face. Picture that looking at God and seeing him and his name will be on their foreheads.

It's like your passport, your entrance into the new world. God's residents, his people in his city, in his kingdom, serving their good and kind master, creating and building and playing and doing all that we ought to be doing.

The chains of the curse have been untied and the freedom of life is enjoyed. And look at the last little picture that we get in verse five.

there is the end of all evil. There will be no more night. When it says no more night it's like what it said in chapter 21 no more sea.

[21 : 34] Night is a symbol of the evil darkness that rules our world. The dark forces that cause so much havoc and harm. But look at verse five.

they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and forever.

In this new world the light of God will banish the darkness of evil. The work and the ways of Satan will be removed never ever to influence again, never to harm again.

Instead of a world that is broken with evil and all the violence and all the crime that we see and read about on our news every single day, it will be gone.

No more sin, no more temptation, no more bad things. This new world will see the end of all evil.

And so through these chapters and through these verses, we've got this amazing colourful picture of the world that is to come.

[22 : 43] Can you see what is being promised? Can you see this amazing gift that is being offered? The kind of world that we all long for.

There's not one person that you know that you work with or live beside or socialise with who wouldn't say, I don't want this. Everything broken is fixed.

All that is old and disordered will be replaced by something new and beautiful. Verse 6, the angel said to me, these words are trustworthy and true.

This is not make-believe. This is not Santa Claus. This is all promised by the true and risen Lord Jesus.

So the gift has been promised and the gift is offered a way in. You see, like every gift, we want to know how we can have it.

[23 : 57] So let's see how we can get this promise. Have a look at chapter 22 verse 14. It says, blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

You see, he's telling us clearly there is a way into this new world. There's a way to get access to the tree of life. There's a way to this abundant fruit and the leaves of healing.

There's a way through the gates into the city where there is no more evil, suffering or fear. We can get there. How? Look what it says at the beginning of verse 14.

Blessed are those who wash their robes. It's telling us that we need to be made clean and pure so that we can go into the clean and pure and good world.

Go back to chapter 7 of Revelation. Keep your finger there in Revelation 22 but go back to chapter 7. Here in an earlier vision we see all this huge crowd, this multitude from all different kinds of nations and they're all part of this new world and the one who's speaking in the vision is wanting to

know where they came from and how they got to be there.

[25 : 31] So we pick it up in verse 13 of chapter 7. Then one of the elders asked me, these in white robes, who are they and where did they come from?

Like how did they get to be in here? I answered, sir, you know. And he said, these are they who have come out of the great tribulation. These are the people who've gone through this world and all its suffering and all the hard things.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Go back to Revelation 22.

You see, he's telling us there that we need to have our robes washed. Now it sounds messy, doesn't it, to be washing your clothes in lamb's blood? But I think we know what it's saying.

This is picture language. It's talking about the death of the Lord Jesus when Jesus the lamb died on the cross, when his blood was spilt.

[26 : 37] It was God's means of washing away sin. It was a way to clean us and to make us right. You could imagine a young man going to his girlfriend's house for the first time, to have dinner, to meet the parents.

Maybe you remember that time. And unless he was a right nut job, he would spend his time getting himself washed and cleaned up and scrubbed up, all the dirt and grime removed, all so that he would be welcomed and accepted into the family.

now if we're going to be welcomed and accepted into God's new world, into his family, into his kingdom, then we need to be cleaned.

Not on the outside, but deep on the inside. And this is why we come to Christ, why we come to Jesus, to find that forgiveness, that cleaning, that washing away of all our sin, past, present and future, all our guilt and shame gone.

blessed, verse 14, are those who wash their robes, who've come to Jesus, that they may have the right, the audacity to be able to go into that new world because we've come to Christ, and to go to the tree of life, and to walk through the gates of that city.

[28 : 19] But please read this carefully. Please read this carefully. Because it is only those who come to Jesus, it is only those who have been washed, that will have access to the tree and walk through the city gates.

Look at verse 15. Outside, outside this new world, are the dogs, meaning the outsiders, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

does that mean that those who do enter are somehow better than everybody else or less sinful than other people?

No, the point is we're all messed up, we're all broken people. We've all done these things that are in verse 15 in one way or another, not necessarily in action, but in thought.

through our minds. The only difference between the group in verse 14 and the group in verse 15 is that those who are in verse 14 have seen their sin.

[29 : 51] They've accepted responsibility for it and they have come to Jesus and they have asked and they have longed for that cleaning and for that washing. Those who are outside have refused it and rejected it.

what a difference. Unless we come to him, we do not have access to the tree of life.

We will not enter the city gates. And I know we know that. But many people don't know that.

this wonderful gift, the way that we can actually enter in, we have something to say to people.

But not only is this gift promised and not only is it offered, it is experienced. Jesus has promised us a wonderful gift and through Jesus we can enjoy that gift.

[31 : 02] But does that mean we have to wait for it? We've sung about it this morning, we've thought about it, do we have to wait until we get to it? Well the answer to that is yes and no.

Yes we do have to wait, we do have to be patient, because the new world will only come when the Lord Jesus returns and puts everything right. But no, we don't have to wait, because that new life has already begun in Christ now.

It's not all in the future. It begins right here, right now. Have a look with me please in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

2 Corinthians chapter 5. In Revelation we're thinking of a new heaven and a new earth, the old order passing away, a new order brought in, a new creation, a new world.

Well look what happens when we turn to Jesus. Chapter 5 verse 17. Read it, see what it says. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.

[32 : 25] The old has gone and the new has come. Do you see what it's saying? What God is going to do on a cosmic scale to the whole world and to the whole universe, what he will do, God has already done and is doing in our lives right now.

That means we don't have to wait for it all to come. The old is replaced with the new. We have begun a new life. The old life is over.

A new life has begun for those who are in Christ who have come to him and who have accepted his washing and his cleansing. We are nothing less than a new creation.

Now that doesn't mean we experience everything now that has been promised, that great big list of pictures that we went through. That will come to us.

But it also means that right now as believers we begin to taste something of what is to come. The other day I had literally that size a piece of Christmas cake.

[33 : 46] A little tiny taste. And I ate it and I thought Christmas is coming. Dinner is coming. All the food that we're going to enjoy.

But it was just a taste. It reminded me of all that is to come. Well because we're in Christ and because we're a new creation, we have so much now to enjoy.

We can enjoy the presence of God. We do have a relationship with our Father in Heaven. The intimacy of talking to Him. That is something amazing.

We do live without fear today of anyone or anything. Why? Because God is with us. The maker of this universe is in us by the power of His Holy Spirit.

He has our future taken care of. What is there to fear? And He's given us His Spirit to fight and overcome sin.

[34 : 48] We don't have to say yes to sin. We don't have to give in to temptation. Because He's given us His power to be able to fight it and to do battle against it.

to resist Satan and his temptation. And while we may go through suffering but He has given us the strength and the grace to cope with it.

To see that it is God's means of changing us and equipping us and preparing us. We have so much now. And we have eternal hope in the face of death.

We know that when we die and when we face the grave we have a future beyond. And we have true life, real life, meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ.

Yes the best is yet to come but all of that life has begun now in the present. Look at chapter 5 verse 17 again.

[35 : 49] Therefore if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come.

What a gift we have been given. You will not find a better gift than this. And what a gift we can give to a world that is desperately in need.

And through Jesus that gift is offered and that gift can be experienced right now today. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father, would you please forgive us for thinking at times that we have nothing help us to see clearly the wonderful gift that you have given to us through your son the Lord Jesus.

Thank you that we have so much to look forward to. A new heaven and a new earth. But we thank you that that life has begun today.

[37 : 25] and we thank you that we are a new creation. We have a new way to live. With the blessing of God upon us, the power of his Holy Spirit, a relationship with our Father in heaven, the right to be called your children.

We thank you so much for all that we have and all that we enjoy because of you. we thank you for this amazing gift. And we pray, Father, as we have been praying, that you would open up an opportunity for each one of us here to be able to offer, tell, or explain to someone this amazing gift that we can have.

love. We pray that we will experience it more and more in our own lives, bring it to a reality in us.

But we pray also that many others, friends and family, would experience this gift too.

We ask for your help in doing this. In Jesus' name we all pray. Amen.