

Hope

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. Isn't that a lovely phrase, faultless stand before the throne? That's a lovely phrase.
- Will you pray with me as we come to God's Word? Our Father, we thank you that you're a God who speaks hope to us.
- Lord, we thank you that our hope is not wishful thinking, but it is grounded in your Son's death and resurrection.
- Thank you that we have such a solid place to stand. Lord, I pray that for those who are burdened by their sin, that you would speak into their hearts this morning.
- And assure them that they are yours and washed. Lord, for those of us who are just going along with the ways of the world and not caring about you, I pray that you would convict us.
- [1 : 1 6] Lord, for those who are suffering and just burdened, I pray that you would renew us with just such a bright picture of what is to come.
- Lord, please speak to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, think ahead to this coming week. What are some good things that could happen?
- So I want you to start listing them in your head. What are some good things that could happen? Now, what would be the best thing that could happen?
- Do you feel like I'm trying to trap you? You know this sermon is about heaven. I'm not trying to trap you. What else is your heart going to?
- What are you thinking of? I wonder if anyone here thought about winning the Powerball. \$150 million last week.
- [2 : 2 8] I'm not encouraging that, by the way. Did anyone think of a new car? I'm looking forward to a new laptop.
- My current one takes two attempts to start up. I can't be too harsh on it because it takes me two attempts to start up in the morning. Would the best thing this week be if you met the love of your life?
- Reconciling that strange relationship. Is it something to do with your kids or grandkids? Getting that home loan approved.
- Passing those exams that are keeping you up at night. Being on holidays. Maybe some thought of their anxiety or depression being lifted.
- Maybe you even thought the best thing is if you died and went to be with the Lord. Maybe you thought of your loved one.
- [3 : 4 3] That they would come to Christ. And have life. I wonder, was your first thought, the best thing that could happen this week is if Jesus turned up.
- And I saw him face to face. And his idea of heaven on earth was put into full effect. For those of us who belong to Christ, when we stop and think about it, we genuinely do desire this, don't we?

We really do. It is our deepest desire. But why is the future that our Father has promised us, the future that Christ died to give us, the future that the Holy Spirit is preparing us for, why doesn't it flood our hearts with an all-consuming desire?

I suspect the answer is, Jesus' words, where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Whatever else your heart cherishes more than our future with Christ, that thing will actually make the idea of heaven unappealing.

How do we replace a lesser love with a greater love?

[5 : 18] We do that. Thomas Chalmers calls it the expulsive power of a new affection. You get rid of one affection by replacing it with a greater affection.

But perhaps part of the problem is that it's just your own imaginary ideas of heaven that you find unappealing.

Whatever the case is, if you're loving something else more than Christ, or if you've got just a wrong idea of heaven, the solution's the same.

We need to listen to what God says. What is our future hope? What is it? What are we looking forward to? What is it? So we're finishing our series in God's words, and it's only fitting that we listen to God's final word in the Bible in Revelation 21 and 22, and it is a word of hope.

Isn't it great that God's final word to us is hope? In Revelation 21 and 22, God shows the Apostle John a vision of the eternal age to come.

[6 : 38] It is full of imagery, but it's not a photograph of what it's literally going to be like. And it's also not a riddle that you have to solve.

Every sentence is just jam-packed with stuff from the Old Testament. It's a picture upon picture.

It's a picture upon picture, mixing metaphors, looking at the same thing from multiple angles to give us a theological picture. So what are we about to see?

What is the end point for all God's work of creating and sustaining the world, speaking and revealing himself, redeeming through the blood of Christ in his resurrection, sanctifying his church, judging the world and sin and Satan?

What is God's goal? What's his end point that he is determined to achieve? What's he doing? Where are we going? We can't cover it all, but we're going to focus on five things.

[7 : 45] We're going to see a new heaven and a new earth. We're going to see the church as the bride. The bride, the bride adorned for her husband.

The best thing, we're going to see his face. What we won't see is any curse anymore.

And because we won't see anything that can wreck it, it will be forever. Then we'll finish by asking a few questions.

How can I be sure that this is my future? How can we be sure that he really is coming? And what are we called to do until he comes?

Have you been to both a Christian and a non-Christian funeral?

[8 : 56] Is there a difference? Did you sense a massive difference? Hope.

Hope. As Christians, we take deep comfort in the fact that we will be with our Lord, freed from the agony of this world.

There's enormous comfort in this. But is that what we're meant to be looking forward to? Is that the end point?

It's good, but is it the end point? Did Jesus rise from the dead so that we could be with him in a spiritual, bodiless existence in heaven?

Verse 1 is God's end point. All these chapters. Verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[10 : 01] For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. God's goal for creation is not that we escape it, but that his original purposes will be fully and finally realized.

Verse 5. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, look, I am making all things new. And he said to me, It is done.

On the seventh day of creation, it is finished. God's purposes. At the completion of King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem in the Promised Land, it is finished.

As Jesus draws his last breath, dying on the cross for your sin, before rising to new life, it is finished. And we're looking forward to when God says for the very last time, when he resurrects heaven and earth, resurrects our bodies, it is finished.

If you're wondering what heaven will be like, go for a walk. Look at the stars. Feel the breeze.

[11 : 36] Roll in the grass. Make angels in the grass. That's what we're encouraged to do at college. Smell the flowers.

Eat some freshly baked bread. Imagine, if you can, nothing ruining it.

It's a new heaven and a new earth. But before we get too obsessed with the place itself, we have to focus our attention on what God is looking forward to most of all.

And surprisingly, perhaps, the majority of Revelation 21 and 22 is about the church.

Verse 2, When you attend a wedding, and the bride, in all her beauty, shining and glimmering, walks down the aisle, do you take a look at the groom to see his reaction?

[12 : 49] Now, some men don't cry. I cannot claim to be one of those men. But this moment is too powerful and overwhelms a lot of guys.

When a husband's beloved is presented in all her glory and all for him, all the preparation has been leading to this moment.

They are on the brink of uniting forever. What's God's goal? What's history moving towards?

The permanent union of Christ and his beloved, the church. Tom Wright calls it the marriage of heaven and earth.

This picture of the bride is zoomed in on from verse 9 onwards. The angel says to John, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

[13 : 54] And what has he shown? A city. So don't picture a city wearing a wedding dress. Mixing metaphors, remember. It's the New Jerusalem.

It's the place God has chosen to live with his people. The place where God's name is. We're not going to go into all the details, but if you skim these verses or read them later on, you see all the precious jewels in the streets are gold.

God's church will be beautiful. Precious. In God's sight. No blemish whatsoever. Holy.

You might be tempted to think that the church is ugly now. It's just getting ready. It's still in preparation.

It's going to sparkle. The city is made up of all the people of God from north, south, east and west.

[15 : 00] All the world. People from all the world. The gates are always open because there's nothing to threaten it from the outside or from within the church.

Nothing threatening it anymore. No Satan. No sinful desires. No divisions in the church. But the church, finally holy.

United as one bride, giving all her affection to her one husband. Jesus Christ. It's relational imagery, isn't it? It's purity language.

And it's not like the church being united to Jesus is approaching something like marriage. It's the other way around.

Marriage is just a small taste of what the real and the permanent thing will be like. Perhaps the most important feature of this city is that it's a cube.

[16 : 05] 2,000 kilometers in length and width and height. That's a bit weird, isn't it? A bit random. There's only one other thing in the Bible that is a cube.

Do you remember what it is? I didn't. Someone had to tell me this week. The Holy of Holies.

The innermost part of the temple where God's presence is. The closest you can get to God. And so, of course, John doesn't see a temple.

There is no temple in the future because God is immediately with us. We don't need the picture anymore. We've got the real thing. The church. God dwelling in his church.

The Holy of Holies. That's what we're looking forward to. The marriage of heaven and earth. Verse 6.

[17 : 12] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people.

And God himself will be with them as their God. The greatest thing we lost at the fall of humanity was not paradise.

It was God's presence. At Mount Sinai, God offered Israel to be their God and they would be his treasured possession.

He would dwell with them in the tabernacle and in the temple. But what happened then? Even while the wedding documents, the covenant was being signed with Moses on the mountain, the people are down below committing adultery, giving their affections to other gods.

But God is committed to his plan. And unlike Moses, who had to be hidden behind a rock to see only the back of God and only for a moment, soon God will come to earth and make his home with us forever.

[18 : 36] The best thing about our future, your future, is summed up in 22 verse 4. They will see his face.

I think we get a sense of what this will be like with those YouTube videos. Not just any YouTube video, but where there's the little girl and her father is a soldier in the army and he's been deployed overseas for years.

And although she has the security of living in the house and food and clothing, although she's received letters from her dad while he's been away, messages from him, you watch those videos.

That day when he enters their home and the little girl sees her father's face, the joy is overwhelming. We will see his face.

Our father will be home with us on earth. Our hope is not so much that we are waiting for a place.

[19 : 54] That'll be excellent. That's part of it. But the main thing we're looking forward to is a person. Our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelling with us.

We will see his face. Em and I were in Barabah, a farming town past Townworth two years ago.

It was only a short time into the drought. And we saw cows so skinny that, you know, you can see their ribs.

And we saw them gathered around what used to be a dam, but it's just this puddle of dirty water. And there's a saying that we heard up there, which is a pretty disturbing thing, but you've got to understand first that farmers love their animals way more than people in the city can understand.

They really love their animals. But there's a saying in rural towns that during drought, farmers buy enough bullets for each of their animals plus one.

[21 : 09] It is that devastating. While being shouted to dinner by such a faithful Christian cattle farming family, it started to rain.

It was only a sprinkle, but gee, it was exciting. It was so exciting. It was just a sprinkle. They need a lot more. At the moment, our bodies, our relationships, our society, our earth are under God's curse for our refusal to let God be God.

We live in a kind of spiritual drought, lacking the knowledge and presence of God. But we see in chapter 22 the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

[22 : 39] And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

Every time you are brought to tears by this world, brought to tears by your own sinfulness, brought to tears by broken relationships, brought to tears by the curse just impacting everything.

And you wipe away your tears. Remember, remember, use it as a memory device. When you wipe away your tears, He will wipe away your tears one day.

He Himself will. every single tear. No more doubts about God's love for us.

No more sensing God's displeasure. Can you imagine it? No more accusations from Satan. No more temptation from the sinful world around us.

[23 : 47] No more temptation from our sinful desires inside. No more mixed motives for what we do. No more burdensome duties that end up fruitless. No more division or arguments in the church.

No more carrying the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. No more of our own suffering. No more being alone. No more fear of dying. Can you imagine it?

Our world doesn't need a little bit of fixing, a bit more evolution, a bit more progress. It doesn't need that. It needs the curse lifted to be renewed into immortality, to be filled with God Himself.

And that's what God promises us. how joyful is it to hear the news that Catherine's bowel surgery was successful and got rid of the cancer.

That's such a relief hearing that. Such joy hearing that, isn't it? praise God for His mercy.

[25 : 08] Do you know what will be even better? That's pretty good. Do you know what will be even better? Is if this week Jesus turns up and Catherine is raised, her whole body raised to be like Christ and together with us we see His face.

If external enemies are gone, if the church is made holy from within, if God's presence fills the earth and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven, if death and corruption are dead, then we will reign with Christ on the earth forever.

It is permanent. But don't confuse permanent with static.

I think sometimes we can be put off by the idea of heaven because we think of it as static. We're just doing the same thing over and over. Like, you know those songs with the bridge that just repeats just a few too many times?

But for eternity? Are you kidding me? I think sometimes we think like that in terms of heaven. Have you seen the variety of this world lately?

[26 : 44] The different beauties? The difference between the blue mountains mountains, to the beauty of Lake Macquarie, to the beauty of the sand dunes, it's just so diverse.

Have you got sick of listening to music lately? You might get sick of a certain song, but have you got sick of listening to music? Have you got tired of spending time with loved ones?

have you got tired of discovering new truth? There's an eternal depth to knowing who God is, and so it's a good thing we've got an eternity to get to know him.

There's nothing in God's idea of the future that suggests it's static. It's very dynamic, but it is forever. it's permanent.

God's final word of hope to us is a new heaven and a new earth. The bride in holy beauty, seeing his face.

[28 : 05] You won't have to put up with my face up here. You'll see him without any curse forever.

The marriage of heaven and earth, is that not the best thing that could happen this week? Well, this picture of our hope, we're left with a few questions.

Firstly, how can I be sure that this is my future? verse 6, God identifies who will receive this future. To the thirsty, I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

This is an echo of the gospel invitation in Isaiah 51. Come, come, come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

[29 : 32] food. It is the one who, like the Samaritan woman at the well, has no payment, no righteousness of her own to offer, but who believes and receives the living water.

That's who will be there. Are you thirsty? Have you come to Christ? another picture of the same answer is given at the end of this chapter.

Nothing unclean will enter into this future, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb who was slain for our sins, who drank the cup of God's wrath so that we get to drink the cup of blessing.

nothing. If you come to Jesus with no currency of your own, but if you thirst for true life and come to him to receive it, then your name is permanently written in the Lamb's book of life.

So are you thirsty? Are you thirsty? Are you dissatisfied with what this world has to offer?

[31 : 05] Do you know that you have nothing to offer God as payment? And come to him and drink his forgiveness.

If that's you, you will be satisfied. And second, how can we be sure he is coming?

How can we be sure he is coming? The basis of our confidence has absolutely nothing to do with how hopeful you feel on any given day, in any given moment.

It's got nothing to do with how you can track it according to the details of politics in the world, as some people try and do. You can be sure he is coming for a very simple but unshakable reason.

He says he will. That's the basis of our confidence. He says he will. So the question is, I can break my word, but does God break his word?

[32 : 21] God, is he trustworthy? Did Adam and Eve die like God said they would if they refused to let God be God?

Did God save Noah and his family when the flood came and destroyed the world? God? Did Abraham become the father of a great nation?

Did God rescue his people from Egypt? Did he destroy the disobedient generation in the wilderness? Did he bring his people into the promised land?

David? Did David become king? Did God's people go into exile? Did God bring them back from exile?

Did the son of David come to earth? Did Christ die for our sins and then rise on the third day? Did God give his spirit to his church?

[33 : 40] Are people from all over the world being brought into his kingdom? Does God keep his word? Behold, I am coming soon.

So what are we called to do while we wait? verses 7 and 8. The one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be his God and he will be my son.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Remember, only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life, who were slain for the sins of the world, will be there. But we're also left with a choice of being conquerors or being cowards.

Will you conquer by crying out with the Spirit and with the Bride, come Lord Jesus, come. Or will you be a coward and not fight for this future?

[35 : 25] just drift along with the ways of this world. What does it mean to conquer? What are we meant to conquer?

We see it in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. Jesus speaks to seven local churches and each of the churches has something that is threatening to steal their love, to steal their trust and their obedience, away from Christ.

Every single one of them has to fight. Some were putting up with false teachings, some were putting up with sexual immorality, some had the appearance of being alive, but they were just going through the motions.

Some faced external threat and pain, some thought they were rich and had all the answers, not realizing they were poor and blind and naked.

Some had lost the love and good works they had at first. Each church has something threatening to steal Jesus' bride's affection and trust and obedience away from him.

[36 : 46] So he calls them, listen to me, conquer, fight, God, you will receive my reward. To struggle, to love and trust and put our hope for the future in Christ alone, that is normal, that is the church, that is the Christian life.

It's a fight of loving and trusting and obeying Christ alone. it does not mean being free from temptation or from trouble in this life.

But the question is, are you in the fight? Or are you a coward in just going along with the ways of the world?

I think we fight by crying out, come.

Come, Jesus, come now. Christ says, I am coming soon and my reward is with me.

[38 : 10] Whatever you do that moves towards this future, it's worth it. Bring people into your kingdom now.

Bring them in, God. Make your church holy now. We want more of heaven now. We cry, come.

Anything you do that moves towards this future is worth it. Let me show you an outstanding man who lived in a way that just showed everyone around him that he was crying out, come now, come Lord Jesus.

There's a guy called John Patton. He was a missionary in Vanuatu in the late 1800s. Just about 20 years before he left for Vanuatu from England, two missionaries, John Williams and James Harris, within minutes of arriving on the island, were clubbed to death and then eaten by cannibals.

people. So when John said to his congregation he felt called to go to Vanuatu and a concerned elder in the church, Mr.

[39 : 42] Dixon, came to him and said, they'll eat you. You'll be eaten by cannibals. Mr.

Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave and there to be eaten by worms.

I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus Christ, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms.

And on that great day, my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer. He got it, didn't he? When you're broken by sickness and the imminence of death, keep fighting the fight of faith.

The new heavens and earth are coming. They're coming. When you're weighed down by your own sinfulness, keep fighting.

[40 : 55] Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Your resurrection is coming. When you are trying to be important and desirable in the eyes of the world, stop being a coward and going along with the world.

That's easy. when you're feeling alone and afflicted by division in the church, keep fighting the fight of faith, which will usually mean stop fighting.

the bride will be beautiful soon enough. When you're weary of doing good, keep fighting.

Your reward is coming. whatever you do that moves towards this future, it's worth it. It's worth it.

Is this future going to define this church? Behold, I am coming soon. what's the best thing that could happen this week?

[42 : 25] Will you pray with me? Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, thank you that you will one day be on earth and we will see your face.

that we won't just have to pray to you, but we can talk to you face to face. Father, thank you for promising such a great future.

Lord, we don't deserve a drop of it. We deserve the opposite, but by your mercy, by your blood alone, you've promised it.

Thank you. Father, forgive us for forgetting what you've promised. Forgive us for wanting something else more than what you've promised.

But thank you for being determined to bring about what you've promised no matter how unfaithful we are. Thank you that you will make it happen. Lord, I pray that you make us individually and as families and as the church.

[44 : 06] Please help us to be defined by a crying outcome. Lord, we want you now. we want the church holy now.

We want to be free of death and the curse now. Give us more of a taste of it now, but Lord, come.

Come. Lord, give us a heart that wants others to come into your kingdom.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.