

Eden Restored

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[0 : 00] Our first reading today will be from Isaiah 65, verses 17 through to 25, and those can be found on page 756 of the Church Bibles. For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create. For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. For the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant barnyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat. For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

[1 : 12] They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity. For they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them.

Before they call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. The wolf and the lamb shall not be the serpent's food. The wolf and the lamb shall be the serpent's food. Our second reading today is from Revelation, chapter 22, verses 6 through to 21, which can be found on page 1251 of the church Bible.

And he said to me, these words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.

[2 : 26] And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said to me, you must not do that.

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God. And he said to me, do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still be right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Outside are the dogs, and sorcerers, and the sexually immoral, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.

[3 : 42] I am the root, and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The spirit and the bride say, come, and let the one who hears say, come, and let the one who is thirsty come.

Let the one who desires take the water of life without a price. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described on this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city which I have described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Well, if you don't mind, on this very warm Sunday morning, I'm going to not wear my jacket. It's a good one, isn't it? Great, great weather. If you could have the Bible open in front of you.

[4 : 54] And you've been given the handout. Thank you to Vicki for producing these. We'll refer to them in just a moment. But why don't we pray together before we look at God's word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we bow in your mighty presence.

Our prayer is that your word might be our rule. That your spirit, that he might be our teacher. And that your honour and your glory alone might be our supreme concern.

For Jesus' sake we ask. Amen. Well, I have that passage open in front of you. We come to the last in our little series on the book of Revelation, which has been really a whistle-stop tour through Revelation.

A lot more could have been said. But some have suggested that the end of the book of Revelation, that is chapter 22, verses 6 to 21, rather, is a sort of rag-bag, untidy collection of random thoughts and jottings.

Or a series of loosely strung together and even fragmented affirmations. One otherwise very helpful Bible commentator accuses John of rounding off his letter to the seven churches with a series of somewhat miscellaneous observations.

[6 : 18] And yet, we know, don't we, that each and every book of the Bible has been breathed out by God the Holy Spirit through different human authors over hundreds of years as they were lifted up and carried along by God the Holy Spirit.

such that what they wrote was 100% their thoughts and their ideas shaped by their own culture and their personal backgrounds. And at the very, very same time, what they wrote was 100% the very words of God the Holy Spirit himself.

What they wrote was breathed out by the Holy Spirit such that it was exactly what he wanted them to say and even how he wanted them to say it right down to the words and grammar used and the ways they organized or structured what they wanted to say.

So my study of Revelation has forced me to agree with Australian scholar Paul Bonnet, who has wrote this. Revelation is perhaps the most carefully structured book in the New Testament.

And we see this, I think, very clearly in the book of Revelation with its seven scenes, again referring to this diagram that you had last week, its seven scenes, each made up of seven parts.

[7 : 40] It's quite remarkable when you look at it and study it and see this. Now Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 8 is the seventh vision of scene 7.

And those of you who have just done your GCSE or doing your GCSE maths will know that seven sevens are? Seven sevens are? Sound a bit uncertain.

Seven sevens are indeed 49. Seven scenes of seven parts. And these verses, chapter 21 verse 1 to 8 act, if you like, like seven trailers, seven movie trailers or previews of what is to come.

And that's, I've tried to depict in the other diagram on the other side of your sheet. The full movies, as it were, are then shown in chapter 21 verses 9 and following to the end of the book.

In other words, the epilogue of the book of Revelation, chapter 21 verse 9 to the end of the book, is a bit like the 50th year, or in Old Testament language, the year of Jubilee.

[8 : 56] During the year of Jubilee, all debts were cancelled. Land was given back to its original owners, and slaves were literally allowed to walk free.

You can read about that in Leviticus chapter 25. It's a wonderful thing. Imagine having all your debts cancelled. The year of Jubilee signalled the inauguration of a moral, spiritual, and national renewal among God's people.

In short, it pointed to a new and fresh beginning. It's therefore unsurprising that in time, the year of Jubilee became the symbol of the ultimate redemption, restoration, and release that God would accomplish on behalf of his people.

It's equally unsurprising then that as a Jew, John would arrange the book of Revelation such that we end up with seven sets of sevens, and that chapter 21 verse 9 to the end of the book would correspond to an eighth set of sevens, or a 50th year, or Jubilee, if you like.

Because these verses are all about a gloriously new and fresh beginning for all of God's people. Wonderful, isn't it? I think it was July 2015 while standing in my bathroom brushing my teeth that I found tears running down both my cheeks as I listened to the radio on my iPhone to the story of a

father talking about his 22-year-old son who was killed in the 7-7 London bombings ten years previously.

[10:55] I think it was virtually impossible to listen to these stories of loss and pain without being moved in some way. Perhaps you've had a similar experience Westminster, Manchester, and the most recent sad event in our country.

Well, we discover that the Jubilee that is coming will put an end to all such loss and pain. In the new heaven and the new earth that God will one day create, you and I will be a dazzlingly beautiful and precious bride to our God, our husband, our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

You and I will dwell securely in his glorious presence and you and I, if we are truly Christians here this morning, will experience a curse-free world.

So imagine with me for a moment a world where every single human relationship is infinitely more precious and beautiful than even the very best and most loving and intimately precious relationship experience here and now.

Imagine also a world that allows each and every person to give full and complete expression to absolutely all their creative and artistic urges, talents, and abilities.

[12:24] Finally, imagine a world where each human being has infinitely more insights, wisdom, and understanding than all the greatest scientists, astronomers, engineers, philosophers, and mathematicians in this world and all down the ages put together.

And then imagine if at the very heart of all this is the Lord Jesus Christ himself whom you and I get to see face to face every single day.

And then imagine that this is infinitely, infinitely better than you could ever have imagined and but it goes on forever and ever. Well, no matter how vivid or active your imagination, you are barely scratching the surface of what the new heaven and the new earth will be like, brothers and sisters. That, in summary, is the first three trailers and their full movies that I put in bold on your diagram, as it were.

And this morning, as we view the four remaining trailers and their full movies, the first thing I want you to note is this. In the new creation, God's word will be revered.

[13:49] In the new creation, in the new heavens, God's word will still have a place. The trailer for our fourth movie, as it were, comes in the second half of verse 5 of chapter 21.

You're going to have to flip between chapter 21 and 22 a little bit. Apologies for that. And it reads as follows. Verse 5, 21. He, that is he who was seated on the throne, said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

And the full movie of this preview comes in chapter 22, verses 6 to 10. Notice first that what the angel says to John in verse 6 of chapter 22 echoes what the one seated on the throne says in the preview in chapter 21 verse 5.

Notice also the emphasis in these verses are on God's word. Verse 6 of chapter 22, these words are trustworthy and true.

Verse 7, blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Verse 9, I am a fellow servant says the angels, with you and your brothers the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book.

[15:09] Verse 10, and he said to me, do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. Then also in the midst of seeing and hearing the revelation of God's word here in scene 7, John falls down to worship the angel that had been speaking to him in verse 8.

But the angel stops him with these words. Chapter 22 verse 9, don't do that, John, I am a fellow servant with you, John, and with your fellow prophets and with all who keeps the words of this scroll.

John, don't worship me like the prophets and other apostles and all who obey the words, God's words, I am just a servant, a fellow slave of God, just like you.

It is the message and not the messenger that needs to be honored and revered because God's word is trustworthy and true. It contains, verse 6, that which must soon take place.

The emphasis here is not so much on not worshipping angels as it is on the importance, the truth, and the trustworthy nature of God's word.

[16:30] God's word contained in the book or the scroll. Verse 6 literally reads, the Lord, the God, the spirit of the prophets sent his angels to show his slaves what must soon take place.

And I hear you, and how I hear you ask, well, why? Through his word. Through his precious word. Then in verse 10, John is told not to seal up the words of the prophecy of this book because it is meant to be read, understood, and obeyed.

Verse 7, verse 7, and behold, I am coming soon, says Jesus. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. By including all this in the last vision of the last scene of revelation concerning the new heaven and the new earth, John is saying, even in the new creation, God's word is to be honored, revered, loved, and obeyed.

Elsewhere, the apostle Peter says this, all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but, but, the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up in your salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[18:15] Have you tasted that the Lord is good? In the new creation, we will not need Bibles, because Jesus will be there in our very midst, speaking his life-giving word, his life-giving true and trustworthy word into our lives.

That is why we need to learn here and now to love his word and to crave after his word, to obey it. What does that describe you here this morning?

Do you still love and crave God's word? Are you up for growth groups every Wednesday or whenever it is that you have them?

Are you dragging your feet, staying behind at work, because, well, you'd rather be there than at Bible study craving God's word? Well, that's the first thing.

The second thing God is saying to us this morning through his word is this, in the new creation, your destiny will be fixed by Jesus. In the new creation, your destiny, my destiny will be fixed by Jesus.

[19:27] Look with me at chapter 21 and the first part of verse 6. It's our second trailer or preview of what is to come and reads as follows. And he said to me, it is done.

I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. The full movie of this preview or trailer comes in 22 verses 11 to 15.

At the center of which is verse 13. in chapter 1 verse 8 and chapter 21 verse 6. It is the Lord God, the one on the throne of chapter 4, who is described as the alpha and the omega.

And now three times in our passage today, we have the words, I am coming soon. Chapter 22 verse 7, verse 12, and verse 20.

I am coming soon, we are told. Although there is some uncertainty about who exactly is speaking at times, from verse 20 it is clear that the one who is coming soon is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[20:32] Verse 20, he who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. So when you put verses 12 and 13 together, it seems also clear that Jesus is claiming in verse 13 to be the alpha and the omega.

Alpha and omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. Hence the phrase the first and the last, the beginning and the ending in verse 13.

In other words, this is further evidence of the divinity of Jesus. Jesus and the Lord God are one and the same being. Two persons, one being.

But the question in verses 11 to 15 of chapter 22 is what does this phrase alpha and omega mean? Well, might I suggest there is an ominous clue in verse 11 of chapter 22.

I'm afraid the extremely sound version lets us down here. The NIV is a better translation of this verse because we have the words that was let us four times in the original in this verse.

[21:56] So this verse should really read like this. Let me read to you how it should read. Let the evil doer still do evil. Let the filthy still be filthy.

Let the righteous still do right. And let the holy still be holy. Four times we have the word let in this verse. At the beginning of creation God said remember let there be light and there was light. At the beginning of the new creation that same word of God says let the evil doer still do evil and let the filthy still be filthy.

in the words of one writer for the wicked it is a terrible let. For the person who has heard yet rejected time and again the pleading cry of the gospel.

And maybe that's you here as you sit here this morning who time and again have hardened their rebellious heart to the fact that Jesus has shown love for them by dying on the cross absorbing in his own broken body all the punishment they rightly deserve that we all rightly deserve.

[23 : 16] This person who turns their back on the truth and trustworthiness of God's word over and over again will one day find that their eternal destiny has become just as fixed and as firm as the creation that God originally spoke into being.

Chillingly they will reach a point in life where repentance or turning from their rebellion all becomes all but impossible. Their eternal destiny will become forever fixed and so they are destined to remain outside the new Jerusalem the city where God dwells with his people according to verse 15. Look at verse 15 with me. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

What John means by dogs hardly needs explanation here. By contrast John writes in verse 11 let the holy still be holy. Let the person who has been set apart by the word of God to be like God in character and in behavior continue to do so, to be so.

They have had, verse 14, their filthy robe of unrighteousness washed clean by the precious blood of Jesus. His death on the cross has cleansed them of all their evil and all their filth.

[25 : 00] As a result, verse 14, their destiny is to enter the city where God dwells and to eat the fruit from the tree of life and to live forever and ever.

the very thing denied to Adam and Eve after their rebellion at the beginning of the first creation. The destiny of this latter group is equally fixed.

You see, at the heart of verse 12 is not some vague notion of being good because it's good to be good. No, each person will be called to account, verse 12, for what they have done with Jesus.

in the new creation, the destiny of every single person will be fixed by Jesus and what has been done or decided about him.

Jesus is the beginning and the end of all things. He was there at the original creation and you will be there at the beginning of the new creation of all things.

[26 : 08] In him all things hold together. Outside of him all things fall apart. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning, the goal, and the end of both my existence and yours.

He spoke the first word and he will have the last word. In the new creation, thirdly, Jesus will satisfy all our deepest longings.

That's the third thing. In the new creation, Jesus will satisfy our deepest longings. Look again back at the preview of this idea in chapter 21, verses 6 and 7.

Chapter 21, verse 6 says this, To the thirsty, I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be his God and he will be my son. John picked up this idea again in chapter 22 and verse 17, but not before introducing Jesus in quite magnificent terms. Chapter 22, verse 16 and 17 says this, I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.

[27 : 34] I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The spirit and the bride say come and let the one who hears say come and let the one who is thirsty come, let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Jesus is both the divine root from which all humanity springs, including the great King David and yet also David's offspring, the promised Messiah in the line of King David who would inherit his eternal kingdom.

Jesus is both humanity and divinity perfectly combined in one person. Therefore he existed before King David and after King David.

So Jesus could say to the religious leaders before Abraham was I am. In Numbers 24 a wayward prophet named Balaam prophesied of a star rising up from among God's people the Israelites.

Peter in his second letter writes of the dawning of the day when the morning star will rise in our hearts. Then in his letter to the church of fire a tire.

[29 : 01] Towards the end of Revelation chapter 2 Jesus promises to give to the one who is victorious and who does his will to the very end the morning star.

Well here in chapter 22 verse 16 we discover that Jesus is that star. He is the bright morning star. He is the one who alone can banish all the darkness by perfectly shining his light into our lives.

Back in the 1980s the preacher, theologian and writer John Piper wrote a book called Desiring God. Many of you will know it, read it. Wherein he argued that it would be wrong for God to value anything more highly than that which is supremely valuable, namely himself.

You and I struggle with this idea, don't we? It sounds arrogant and self-absorbed, but that is only so if you are not God.

[30 : 10] Therefore since God himself is the most supremely valuable object or person in this entire universe, in view of his infinite wisdom, power and beauty, the most loving thing he can give you and me is indeed himself.

Because there is nothing more precious or valuable in this entire universe. In fact, to withhold himself from us such that we could never contemplate him, praise him, bring glory to him, would be the most ungracious thing he could ever do to us.

Because we can only be and are most satisfied in him. The great early church theologian Augustine famously wrote that God made us for himself and we are restless until we rest in him.

No wonder his spirit and his bride says, come, come, in verse 17. The rest of verse 17 echoes Isaiah 55 where we hear these words.

Come, everyone who thirsts, thirsts, come to the waters, he who has no money, come, buy and eat, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

[31 : 39] 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 yourself in rich food.

Remember in John 4, Jesus promised that woman at the well that whoever drank the water that he gives would never ever thirst again. And not only is what Jesus offers deeply satisfying here, not only does it satisfy our deepest needs, but also get this, it's free.

Back in 21 verse 6 he promises water without payment. Here in 22 verse 17 it's described in the same way. It will cost you nothing because it costs God everything.

And in chapter 21 verse 7 he promises to be our God and that we can be his children. He promises us himself in the form of a deeply intimate, deeply satisfying father-child relationship.

Imagine a relationship where all your longings and desires are fully met and fully satisfied. longings and desires you didn't even know you had until they were satisfied.

[33 : 13] And then imagine that being infinitely better than you ever, ever imagined. And then imagine that that goes on forever and ever.

That's the new heaven and the new earth. Finally, fourthly, in the new creation, no one who opposes God will be allowed in. Can I encourage you to pay attention, particularly if you're not yet a Christian here this morning.

In the new creation, no one who opposes God will be allowed in. Verses 18 and 19. In the new creation, God's world will be revered, the destiny of every person will be fixed, our deepest longings will be satisfied and fully met, and finally, in the new creation, no one who opposes God will be allowed inside.

Chapter 21 verse 8 and chapter 22 verse 18 and 19 are pretty clear on this point. And John's been clear throughout the book of Revelation, if you take the time to read the whole book.

In contrast to those who are victorious because they're on the winning side with Jesus, John writes in verse 8 of chapter 21 our last trailer or preview, 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.

[34 : 56] which is the second death. And as we look at what John writes in verses 18 and 19 of chapter 22, it's clear that the real problem that people listed in verse 8 of chapter 21 have is an unwillingness to accept God's word for what it is.

In the words of one writer, tampering with the text of the last book of the Bible is a minor matter compared with the sin that they really condemn.

See, John is not condemning the person who scribbles notes at the end of their Bible or accidentally rips out a page from a book in the Bible by mistake.

That is a completely and rather crudely missed the point of what he's saying here. So look with me at verse 18 and 19 of chapter 22.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city.

[36 : 15] which are described in this book. You see, the book of Revelation is all about the word of God and in particular the testimony of Jesus according to verse 16 of chapter 22.

Jesus is both the producer and the main character of the book of Revelation. The cowardly and the unbelieving will always seek to either add to or take away from the message of the gospel contained in the book of Revelation.

To add or take away from the book of Revelation is to add or take away from the gospel, the good news. And either add or taking away from the gospel means to reject the Jesus of the gospel. See, there are people today who think they can claim to belong to Jesus and yet live an openly immoral lifestyle. God will be judged in this book.

In other words, they'll be judged and condemned. There are others who claim to believe but who then remove from their thinking and behaviour various ideas from God's word which they deem unacceptable and they want the rest of us to just fall into the line.

[37 : 36] And some of these people are within the church itself. Well, according to verse 19, God will take away their share in the tree of life and their place in the holy city.

The gospel is not yours or mine to tamper with, whether by addition or by subtraction. After 14 chapters of warning the Corinthians against the inconsistencies in their behaviour as those who claim to believe the gospel, Paul warns the Corinthians with these very sobering words.

Listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 15. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believe in vain.

that little word if is so easy to overlook and yet so important to understand. I continue to be struck by writer, preacher, and church planter, Richard Cochin's commentary of these verses when he writes this, it is possible to believe something that is not the true gospel and so not be saved.

The gospel by which we are saved proclaims particular things about Jesus, who Jesus is, and what Jesus did.

[39 : 12] I remember several years ago now, meeting with a young man in South Africa, where I was living at the time, who professed to be a Christian, but whose lifestyle, by his own admission, was very much out of step with someone who claimed to know and love Jesus.

Despite this fact, he was very confident of his standing before God. I must say, though, I left that meeting with him deeply concerned about his spiritual well-being, and where he would end up.

I was concerned that he was believing in the gospel that allowed him to profess A while living B. I was concerned that he was opposing Jesus without even really realizing it.

And that is scary, because according to John, in the new creation, no one who opposes God will be allowed to enter in. Can I ask you, where do you stand this morning as you sit here listening to what I've just been saying for the last half an hour?

John closes his letter with these words, he who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

[40 : 35] Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you, we thank you that in a new creation your word will still be revered, that the destiny of every person who has ever lived will be fixed, and yet that Jesus satisfies our deepest longings.

God but help us to be mindful of the fact that your word also teaches that no one who opposes you, no one who has not embraced the gospel of your son Jesus, will be allowed in.

My prayer is that there be no one in this room who falls into this latter category, and I pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. Amen.