

The New Heaven and New Earth

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[0 : 0 0] Revelation 21. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. 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. 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.

[1 : 3 7] Then came one of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.

On the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies four square, its length the same as its width.

[2 : 4 6] And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysalite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth cryopraise, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there.

[4 : 12] They will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations, but nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

For those who don't know me, my name is Michael Lynn, and I am a member of the congregation here at Grace Church Dulwich. Now do keep your Bibles open, or your phones on Revelation 21.

We'll be flicking to verses in it as we go along. But let me open with a prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is light, and in it there is no darkness.

So please, Lord, help us to see the glory of the new creation that awaits your people. Help us be excited by it and long for its coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now let me begin by asking a question. What's the biggest threat facing Christians today? What do we find most challenging in our Christian lives?

[5 : 20] And I guess the answer to that question will be different for each of us, depending on our circumstances. Now the Christian life isn't all plain sailing. We will have good times, but we'll have tough times as well.

At some point, every Christian will experience both highs and lows. But whatever we face, I want to encourage us to keep going. Because sticking with Jesus is worth it.

And that's my theme for Revelation 21. Despite life's ups and downs, sticking with Jesus is worth it. And the book of Revelation starts with the vision of the Lord Jesus in all his glory.

And he writes to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. And tells them the things that they're doing well, but also the things or the threats they face.

And those threats are still the same for us today. For some, it could be the lure of false teaching or sexual immorality. For some, it's the threat of hostility and persecution.

[6 : 22] And for many, it's the slow, almost imperceptible drift into spiritual sleepiness or spiritual uselessness.

Now, any of us living in this world here in London, this great glittering cosmopolitan city, will know how hard it is to escape all she has to offer.

How hard it is to live distinctively as Christians. Now, consciously or subconsciously, it's much easier to go with the flow of the world than to stick with Jesus.

Our friends may tell us, choose the way of the world and we can have anything we want. Work hard and a successful career awaits. Get drunk and pepper our language with profanity and popularity often follows.

In a world that celebrates sexual promiscuity and easy access to pornography, why hold back? Our friends tell us, anything goes, but please, keep Jesus to yourself.

[7 : 25] We don't want him ruining our party. It's a world, in a world that's turned her back to Jesus. God's people feel small and weak.

Sticking with Jesus is hard. And it's all too easy to lose hope and give in. So just like those churches 2,000 years ago, we too need big encouragements to endure and persevere in the Christian life.

And wonderfully, that's exactly how Revelation and the Bible finishes. So I've given my talk three headings today. Three big encouragements, if you like, to spur us on and to stick with Jesus to the end.

And my first big encouragement is this. God will make everything new. Look, God will make everything new. And now the book of Revelation may seem confusing and overwhelming with its imagery and symbolism and beasts and horns and plagues and funny numbers and so on.

But the main thrust of the book is actually rather simple. It's the story of the world and human history seen from the perspective of heaven. Now, therefore, how Revelation finishes, how human history finishes, has huge implications for every one of us, whether we're Christian or not.

[8 : 50] And the way it finishes can be summed up in two words. Jesus wins. Jesus wins, and those who trust him are on the winning side.

Now, chapters 21 and chapter 22, which we'll look at next week, are like epilogues for the whole book of Revelation. In the middle, from chapter 12 onwards, a huge cosmic battle is taking place.

Satan and his minions do battle against Christians and God's angels. And for a while, Satan seems to be winning. But by chapter 18, Satan's war is already lost.

And out of spite, he brings down as many souls as he can with him. And in chapter 19, Satan's destruction is complete. Heaven rejoices, and God's people enter their new home, triumphant, like a homecoming for conquerors.

And knowing the ultimate outcome means no matter what dangers, hostility, or temptations we may face as Christians, we can be completely confident that Jesus wins.

[9 : 59] And if we stick with him also, we also win. So, turn to verse 1 then.

Let's look with me at verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth has passed away, and the sea was no more.

And the world isn't as it should be. But one day, God promises to make everything new. It'll be a world completely unspoiled by sin and evil, a world restored to the glory it's supposed to be.

And notice it's physical, a new earth, as well as cosmic, a new heaven. And the sea, which is a symbol of sin and chaos throughout the Bible, well, it will be no more.

It will be a new beginning. It will be a new and perfect world. And it's not make-believe or wishful thinking by John the author. It will happen because the creator of the universe said it will.

[11 : 05] Now, verse 5, God said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. Now, throughout the Bible, God's promises never failed to come true.

And Jesus' own death and resurrection happened exactly as Isaiah prophesied 700 years earlier. God's perfect track record means we can have complete confidence in what he says.

And for those of us who are lost in the trappings of London or find the tides of this world too hard to resist, we need to know that swimming against the current is worth it.

Whatever London promises, successful career, popularity, or even a comfortable lifestyle, all these things might be good things.

But know this, that God's new world will be far better than even the best things of this world. You might ask, well, who will be in this wonderful new world?

[12 : 07] Well, that brings us to our big encouragement. Number two, Jesus' spectacular bride. Jesus' spectacular bride. Now, look with me at verse 2.

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And then also verse 9.

The angel said, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Now, Jesus is the Lamb, and his bride, or New Jerusalem, is the church.

Right now, the church looks weak and despised, but that's only temporary. Look at what she becomes permanently. Verse 11. She will have the glory of God, her radiance, like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Or verse 18. Her wall, built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the walls of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

[13 : 12] Jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl.

And the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. This is the ultimate wedding. And in the ultimate wedding, God will adorn the ultimate bride, the church, with every good thing.

No expense is spared. He will lavish abundance on his church in every way. She will lack absolutely nothing. All the things that seem so attractive in this world cannot hope to compare to the glory of the perfected church.

In the new creation, God's people won't miss anything from this world. There won't be any more FOMO, fear of missing out. No one will be wanting more wealth or a better career or more popularity.

No one will be pining over a bigger house or a faster car or more sex or finer foods or more toys. No one will be needing better health, more happiness or more comfort.

[14 : 31] Everything that is good, God will not hold back. Anything we hold dear from this world simply cannot compare to the next. The church will be utterly spectacular.

Now just check out some aspects of her magnificence. Now verse 12, she will have an unparalleled security detail. Notice she will have a great high wall, which is impenetrable by any would-be attackers.

Twelve gates with twelve angels. Possibly the same sort of powerful angels who held bowls of plagues in chapters 15 and 16. Or the angel who struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night in two kings.

And the protection will be from all directions. In verse 13, east, north, south, west. It will be 360 degree, every angle, all the time.

Her security is guaranteed. And look how she's built upon an unparalleled heritage. On the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed.

[15 : 41] And then in verse 14, the walls of the city had twelve foundations. And on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. In chapter 19, we had the twenty-four elders, didn't we?

God's faithful witnesses through both the Old and the New Testament. They're the founding fathers of the church. And then look at her perfect proportions.

Verse 16, the city lies four squares. She's described as a city. Its length and the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia.

Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits. Now some of our Bibles have footnotes translating those measurements to today's units.

But I think of more value is actually to remember the language in Revelation is impressionistic. It's less about exact measurements or the images, but more about the tone and the feel of the scene.

[16 : 44] Think more Picasso, less photographs. Broad brush strokes rather than fine detail. And that principle also applies to number 12.

It's a symbolic number in the Bible for completeness. Twelve gates, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve foundations, twelve apostles. And twelve thousand stadia is twelve times a thousand.

And 144 cubits is obviously twelve times twelve. In other words, the perfected church will be chock-a-block with Christians as one massive family from all races and all nations.

All of God's people will be there. None will be missing. And anyone who's not supposed to be there won't be allowed in. It's exactly as God intended. The church will be spectacularly beautiful, lavishly abundant, and completely secure.

Therefore, whatever we may face, stand firm with Jesus. Because the people of God will be made spectacular. And therefore, don't be fooled by this world.

[17 : 57] London and all she has to offer. Opportunity, career, lifestyle, entertainment, fame, and so on. And here in Dulwich, perhaps life has turned out alright for us. And we might live in the lap of luxury and peace compared to many persecuted Christians in Nigeria or North Korea.

For many of us, our Christian experience probably isn't one of suffering or marginalization. But just remember, our outlook for life shouldn't just be about the next week or years or months or even decades for ourselves or for our children.

No, our outlook should be fixed on the glory of eternity. Everything we enjoy in this world will be nothing compared to what God will lavish on his people in the new creation.

Hold on. Not to this world. Some of us, our Christian walk hasn't exactly been smooth sailing. And there's been tough times. Perhaps we're going through a rough patch right now.

We'll know that this world isn't how it's supposed to be. God will make everything right. He will restore his people.

[19 : 13] And he will lavish everything that is good on his people. Fix our eyes on Jesus and stick with him. It will be worth it.

And lastly, our forever home. Now, I think a forever home is a house we settle and grow far beyond just a house in this world.

And here we're given a tour of this new home. Look with me at verse 3. 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. And like newlyweds in a honeymoon, Jesus welcomes the church into her forever home. And he will be with us.

We will enjoy the sheer pleasure of him, not just for a few days, but for eternity. Utterly inseparable. And our home will be wonderfully prepared by God.

[20 : 15] Now take a look at what he will do for her. Verse 4. He will wipe away every tear from their eye no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.

For the former things have passed away. Johnson's catchphrase for the baby shampoo is no more tears. My dad used to work there, and he told me there's no more tears because the pH level of the shampoo matched the human eye.

Simple chemistry. Yet even this clever pharmaceutical innovation can't stop our child from crying if their favorite rubber ducky goes missing. But we won't need clever shampoos in our new forever home.

We won't need funeral directors or doctors either. There won't be COVID. There won't be any sickness. There won't be insurance companies or prisons. There'll be no more interpersonal problems, employment disputes, health and safety forms, or DBS checks.

We'll no longer worry about job security or saving money or even spending money. Any worries, regrets, painful memories will be wiped away.

[21 : 27] They will not be remembered. Instead, we'll experience God's full love and compassion, his justice and his mercy, his grace and truth, his faithfulness forever.

God is our full satisfaction and joy, and we will enjoy all that forever. But did you spot the surprise in verse 22?

Now, no temple. What's going on here?

Well, the Old Testament temple is the place where God and man met. Symbolically, it's where God dwelled on earth, and humans can only approach if they're clean. But the problem is no one was clean.

So that the only way the people could approach was through the blood of sacrificed animals. And as Jesus Christ took our punishment on the cross, he became that ultimate sacrifice.

[22 : 34] His blood washed us clean so that we can have the privilege to approach God directly and thereby abolishing the need for a temple. And in a sense, every Christian can approach God through the Holy Spirit.

That's why through prayer we have the hotline to the creator and sustainer of the universe. And we can talk with him anytime we want. It's a taster of things to come.

And in our forever home, we won't even need that red telephone. We will be in God's glorious presence. We will be by his throne forever.

And we will be kept pure. In verse 23, the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And the gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. The light is symbolic of spiritual purity.

[23 : 42] And no night means there's no darkness. Darkness represents sin and everything that rejects God. And this means our new home will be kept pure and clean forever.

Not simply from dust and dirt, but our hearts will be kept faithful to and holy for the Lord Jesus. Never to fall away or stray from him ever again.

Our sins no longer remembered. Our guilt and shame washed away forever. It will be us, but perfected. Everything will be made new.

A spectacular people of God and an incredible forever home. And what a wonderful promise for every Christian. Our friends, we could end there.

But there is a stern warning for those who reject Jesus. You see, there's actually two forever homes here in view. Now take a look at verse 27.

[24 : 44] Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. And then also verse 8.

As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murders, 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.

Now just this week, the UN's IPCC, or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published a report on climate change, and it splashed across every front page of newspaper.

Code red for humanity. An urgent wake-up call to the world to cut emissions radically. Everyone must act now to avoid a global catastrophe.

Now whether we're on board with the claims of climate change or not, the far, far greater and the more urgent wake-up call is right here in Revelation in these verses.

[25 : 55] If the world is all we live for, we may achieve everything we ever wanted, reach the zenith of human success. But if we end up rejecting Jesus, eternal catastrophe awaits us.

Instead of going home with God, our home will be eternal torment. A second death far more terrifying than the first. This then is a warning.

Don't invest in the wrong forever home. Repent and turn to Jesus. But if we're a follower of Jesus, then be assured, because our names are written in his book of life.

Our forever home will be pure joy, and we will be inseparable with him forever. So as the world tries to distract and pull us away from Jesus, let's remember this vision and encourage one another in the new creation.

Let's rejoice in the splendor of the church and long for our forever home. Let's fix our eyes firmly on Jesus so that we can stick with him through anything we may face.

[27 : 16] Shall I pray? Shall I pray? Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for this incredible vision of your new creation.

Thank you for your son who you gave for us to die for us so that we might return home to him. We're sorry when we fail to trust you as we should, and when we love the things of this world more than we love you.

So help us, we pray. Help us to fix our eyes firmly on this wonderful vision in Revelation 21. Help us rejoice in it and yearn for its coming so that we can stick with Jesus to the end.

In his name I pray. Amen.