

SUMMER 4 - Glimpses of Glory

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 1998

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] We thank you that your words are trustworthy and true. We thank you that John obeyed the command to write them down and that over the centuries these words have been preserved for our benefit, for our training in righteousness, for our correction and reproof, for our godliness and for our salvation.

And we pray, our God, tonight that you will apply these words to our hearts by your spirit, that they may fulfill your purpose of those words and for us in our lives.

Amen. Well, we come to that final vision, that final scene of this great apocalyptic series of visions. For the eighth time, John sees something. And I saw, he says. And this time it's a new heaven and a new earth. All the other things that we've seen so far through John's eyes have happened in the old heaven and old earth.

But now a new heaven and a new earth, for the first had passed away and there was no longer any sea. A little postscript almost. The sea was often a sign or symbol of something that was, at best, dark and mysterious, at worst, evil for Jewish thinking.

[1 : 26] The Jews never have been, and never were in the ancient world, a sea-going race of people. So for them the sea was something dark and mysterious. And through what we see in these two chapters depends heavily on parts of the Old Testament.

And we've seen that in recent weeks and last year as well. And I draw out that point again to remind you that the key to Revelation, apart from the first century AD when it was written, is the Old Testament.

So that's where we find the clues to what's going on. And in these last two chapters, not only those last chapters of Ezekiel are found, as I mentioned last week, and we'll see again a couple of times tonight, but also the last two chapters of the book of Isaiah as well.

This new heaven and new earth is new in quality, not just in chronology, that is, one that succeeds another. It's not just sort of like a new day and we get up and really today is just like yesterday, it's just that it's the next one in the sequence.

But this new heaven and new earth is of a new quality. That's the hint behind the word that's used. It suggests something that's got some discontinuity with the old heaven and old earth.

[2 : 36] This is better than the preceding. And we should also be careful not to think that the new heaven and new earth and the picture of heaven that we're getting is just a sort of spiritual fantasy land or fairy land.

This new heaven, this new earth, this heaven for where Christian people will be for eternity is just as physical as this earth is now. In a different way perhaps, but it's not just a spiritual being or spiritual existence.

It is physical. Maybe in a different sense to this. This opening verse of these final two chapters, the opening verse of this final vision, reminds us that God is in the business about making things new. He's in the business of recreating. The opening chapter of the Bible was about God making things. But we see in early chapters of Genesis how that is marred by human sinfulness.

And ever since that point, God has been about the business of making things new. Remember that famous verse in 2 Corinthians 5, that if anyone is in Christ, a new creation.

[3 : 42] And that's in a sense what's going on here as well. God making a new creation through Jesus Christ. What does John see though when he sees the new heaven and the new earth?

He sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. What we have here is a combination of images that logically don't quite fit.

That is, the city is a bride. Well, cities aren't brides. Cities are in a sense inanimate. And a bride is a person. But the city is a bride, is the new heaven and new earth.

That is, they're different descriptions of the same thing. And as we'll see, and as we should already guess because of the term bride from last week, it is the picture of the church.

The new heaven, the new earth, the new city, the holy Jerusalem, the bride is a picture of the church. So let's try and keep that in our minds when we see this extraordinary description of this new heaven and new earth.

[4 : 50] It is a description of the church that is God's people. It is therefore a description in part of us at the end of time. It's an extraordinary description anyway.

But to think it's a description of us, the church, makes it even more extraordinary, surely. Notice that this new city, this holy city, the new Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven.

That is, it's not made by human beings, nor made by Christians. We are not in the business of trying to establish heaven on earth now.

Politicians might claim to do that, but they're wrong and they'll fail, whatever their colors. Heaven comes from God. It is God's creation.

And remember that what's coming down out of heaven is, in a sense, us, the church. It is God's creation, not ours, not our work, not our ability. It doesn't come from social evolution.

[5 : 51] As the human race somehow gets more sophisticated or better, like the sort of earlier part of this century, those liberals of great optimism thought, no, it comes from God. Nor will it come from revolution.

It comes from God. Hebrews 11 tells about this same city. It calls it the city whose foundations are built by God. It's the same point that's being made there.

It's interesting that at the end of the Bible, Jerusalem comes in this focus. All through the Old Testament, not least in the book of Isaiah, but also Ezekiel and probably most of the prophets for that matter, Jerusalem is the focus point of the hope of God's people.

That one day, God would establish Jerusalem as the heart or the center of the universe, and to Jerusalem would flock people of every nation to worship God.

Now we see that again being prophesied. The access we'll see is through Jesus Christ, not through a Jewish state in Palestine since 1948, or anything else political like that, but through Jesus Christ will those Old Testament prophecies be fulfilled.

[7 : 00] When we think of a city, we should not think just of inanimate buildings and trams and trains and pollution and smog. A city is people. This is a picture of the church, remember.

So let's try and think of people, not buildings, when we think of this picture of a city. And of course this city is very much in contrast to the city we saw last week and the week before, Babylon, Babylon, the city that stands for everything opposed to God.

Babylon, remember, was also a harlot, a prostitute. And this city is also a woman, but this city is a bride, beautifully adorned. What a contrast between one that's evil and one that's good, between the harlot and the pure bride, pledged to one groom.

We also ought to remember that the New Testament's point of view is that we already belong in this city.

This is not just something that we look forward to being part of after history, or when Jesus returns, or when we die. But we already belong there. Our citizenship is there, not here.

[8 : 13] Writer to the Hebrews again in chapter 12 says, You have come, past tense, you have come to the New Jerusalem, to the city built by God, to Jesus Christ.

We belong. We're already in this picture, even though this is in a sense us at the end of time. And remember that this city, which is also a bride, has been beautifully dressed for her husband.

Remember back to last week, chapter 19, the clothes that were given her to wear, that is, this bride is beautifully dressed, not by themselves, but by God.

It is God's work to make beautiful. It is God's work to begin our salvation, and it is God's work to finish it, bring it to completion. And that's what this is a picture of.

That our salvation from beginning to end, comes from God. Just as Wesley said in that famous hymn, Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless, let us be.

[9 : 14] That's a prayer that we sometimes sing, that is looking forward to this picture, being eventuating, in the world. Well John having seen, now hears, a voice from the throne, suggesting that it's God's voice.

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and women that is, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God. If you know your Old Testaments, you find nothing new in that statement.

It is the promise of the Bible, from very early on to the end, that God will dwell, and the idea is of permanence, rather than temporiness, of permanent dwelling between God and humanity.

And it is after all, what God is on about, from the beginning of the Bible. When he made the world, the universe, and humanity in that world, he made human beings, to live with him, permanently, with direct access.

The picture there, was the Garden of Eden. But after sin came in, through man's evil, mankind was expelled, from that garden. And ever since then, throughout the whole of the Bible, the dwelling of God, has not been, as it ought to be, with humanity.

[10:26] There's been a barrier, created in effect, by human sinfulness. And all through the Bible, though there are symbols, of God's presence, it's never totally direct. So when God calls out, the people of Israel, to be his special people, he has symbols, of his presence.

A pillar of cloud, and fire in the wilderness. A tabernacle, that signifies his holy presence. Yes he's really present, but it's still a barrier. And then when they settle, in the land eventually, under Solomon, a temple is built.

And there at the heart, of the temple, God dwells with his people. And yet though it's a sign, of God's grace, in coming to dwell, in the midst of a sinful people, there is still, that indirectness, still a barrier, still priests, who mediate, between the people and God.

And then in the end, the temple's destroyed, but Jesus Christ comes, as God with us, the words at the beginning, of Matthew's gospel. And yet still, that presence of God, is not absolute.

Jesus dwelling, in the midst of a sinful people, yes, but it's not the end, of what God is on about, in dwelling with his people. And when Jesus dies, and rises from the dead, and ascends to heaven, he says, I will be with you, to the end of the age, and sends his Holy Spirit, to God's people.

[11:35] And that's in a sense, a deeper way, of God dwelling, with his people forever. But here it is, fully, in effect. God, dwelling with his people. No mediators, no priests, no buildings, as we'll see, that sort of cut off, God from people.

This is a perfect, direct access. Everything the Garden of Eden was, and more, as we shall see tonight. But it also reminds us, that at the heart of heaven, is a relationship with God.

That's its key. It's not just sort of idleness, you know, those lovely Sunday afternoons, as though heaven's going to be, one long Sunday afternoon, where we can put our feet up, and watch TV, or have a snooze, or something.

Heaven is about relating to God. That's what it is. A description of heaven, is God dwelling with his people. He will be their God, and they will be his people.

Yes, it's a picture of joy. No tears. They'll be wiped from the eyes. No death. No mourning, or crying, or pain. All those things mark the old order, John says in verse 4.

[12:42] That is, they mark the order, that's marred by human sinfulness. Death, we're told in Old and New Testaments, is the result of human sinfulness, either directly, or indirectly.

All that will be gone in heaven. Human beings will be made perfect. He who is seated on the throne said, I'm making everything new.

Not just me. It's not just my soul dying, and going to heaven. It is about the whole universe, being made new. So often we, fall into that sort of pious thinking, that really what God is on about, that is my soul, being with him forever.

But what God is on about, is a whole new heaven and earth, making all things new. It's a much bigger scale, than what sometimes we think about. God says to John, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

That is to emphasize, the importance of these words. Well then we move into, a new little section if you like, a sub scene. God again speaking, it is done.

[13:55] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters that is, of the Greek alphabet, which is the language John spoke, and the language he would have written this book in, in the first place. He was after all exiled on a Greek island.

Lucky him. The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost, from the spring of the water of life.

Now when God says, I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters, expression he's already used, in the first chapter of this book of Revelation. He's not talking about God's existence, being in the beginning and at the end.

It's not a sort of philosophical statement, about God. Rather it's saying, that what God begins, he finishes. And that's the message of, this book of Revelation.

It's an assurance to Christian people, that God who has saved them through Jesus' death, will bring them to completion, on the day of Christ. God is saying, what I've begun, I will finish.

[14 : 53] Trust me. That's what he's saying here. Reminds us that, also of, when does our salvation begin? The day I respond with faith?

Well, no, in God's scale, it begins at the beginning. We were chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Paul says in Ephesians 1. So what God has begun, way back there, before the foundation of the world, this is a picture of its completion, salvation, on the final day of Christ.

But what a great picture. Those who are thirsty, come to me. Words like in John chapter 7. But it's a great picture, not just because if we're thirsty, here we get a drink. This is talking about something of eternal importance, eternal thirst, if you like.

But the hidden, little important words, in the middle of all that are, to him, or the person, who is thirsty, I will give to drink, without cost. We don't pay, we don't earn, it's a free gift.

It's an image or metaphor of salvation, isn't it? Whoever is thirsty, that is, whoever is desiring salvation, come to God. And it is theirs without cost.

[16 : 04] Well, it's actually very costly. It costs Jesus' death. But it's God who pays the cost, not us. What a fantastic picture, of the character of God.

A God who is so full of grace, that he extends to us freely, no strings attached. Like being given the best tickets to the tennis, or a free invitation to some important event.

God's grace is free, no strings attached. He pays, we don't. It doesn't mean that grace is cheap, it's actually very costly, because it costs the death of Jesus.

And God's words continue, he who overcomes, will inherit all this, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. Again, words that are so rich, about the character of God, that he wants, his people, to be his children.

We're not naturally God's children. It's not as though every person in the world, is a son or daughter of God. The Bible makes it very clear, that to be called a child of God, is a statement of honour, that God bestows by his grace, on those, who respond to him with faith.

[17 : 19] Very often we hear it said today, that, oh well every person is a child of God. Well yes, it's true that God made everyone, but it's not true biblically speaking, that everybody is his child.

To be a child of God, is a statement about Christian faith. We are children through adoption, not natural birth. When we respond to Jesus Christ, with faith and repentance, God adopts us in, as his children, into his family.

But that's a statement of grace again, isn't it? That God does that freely for us, and calls us his children, and allows us to call him, our father.

He who overcomes, is not somebody who's strong, not somebody who's powerful, but somebody who trusts in the blood of Jesus. Because throughout the book of Revelation, the expression to the one who overcomes, occurs many times.

Put them all together, and it's clear, that we overcome, through Jesus, who has overcome the world, already. There's no other way to overcome, but through Jesus Christ.

[18 : 29] So this is not telling us, that we have to work to overcome, but rather we rely on the one Jesus, who has already overcome the world. Now just to be clear, that this is not a picture, of universal salvation, that is that every person, of any race, or color, or creed, or inclination, has all been brought into heaven, willy nilly.

Verse 8 makes it clear, that's not the case. The cowardly, which may suggest, Christians who fall away, from their faith, under persecution, that is who exercise cowardice, in the face of threats, to them by the Roman Empire.

The unbelieving, that is the pagans, full stop. And the vile, murderers, sexually immoral, those who practice magic, arts, idolaters, and all liars. Their place, will not be in this new heaven, and new earth.

This picture of, the new Jerusalem, the holy city, their place, will be in the fiery lake, of sulfur, the second death. The same place, that we've already seen last week, where the devil, the false

prophet, and the beast, have been thrown, along with all those, who follow them.

Now this is not just, this is not a sort of, a fright, or scare tactic, for those, who somehow fall, in their Christian life. It's talking about those, who keep on practicing, such things.

[19 : 42] And it's saying, there's no place for them, with God, for eternity, at all. It's against, a statement against, deliberate and impenitent sin. Now an angel speaks, in verse 9.

It's one of the ones, we saw, a few weeks ago, carrying the bowls of plagues. For this time, not a statement of wrath, but of invitation. Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.

Now remember, that the bride is the church, so here is an invitation, to see the church, in all its glorious splendor, on the day of Christ. Last week, we saw in chapter 19, that everything was ready, for the marriage feast.

Now, comes the picture, of the bride, the church. And John's carried away, in the spirit, to a mountain, great and high. And he was shown, the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down, out of heaven, from God.

Stressing, that it's God's work, not humans work. It shone like, with the glory of God. That is God's presence, dwelling within us, shining at glory.

[20 : 50] When Moses went into the tent, into God's presence, he came out with his face, beaming and shining. Not unlike Jesus, on the mount of transfiguration. Here now, is the whole of God's people, of every age, the church universal, beaming, with the brilliant glory, of God himself.

Suggests something, about holiness as well. That here now, and at last, is the holy church. We don't have to read far, or look far, in our day and age, to see a church, that is not holy.

A church that keeps failing. That's divided, immoral and heretical, in so many places and ways. But here, is what surely, we all long for. The holy church.

The pure, perfect church. Spotless, and blameless, in God's sight, at last. It's brilliance, like that of a precious jewel, a jasper, clear as crystal. I think in many of these, stones and images, that we get, it's not as though, each stone signifies, a particular thing, or aspect of character, but rather, that the general picture, is of brilliance, preciousness, ornateness, beauty, and so on.

It had a great, high wall, as of course, cities in the ancient world, did. Twelve gates though. If you were building, a city with a great, high wall, the great high wall, is for protection, the weakest place of a wall, is its gate.

[22 : 12] In an ancient city, you don't build many gates. Twelve gates? The modern, or what's left of the old city, of Jerusalem today, has seven gates. But some of those, are even relatively modern, compared to Jesus.

But twelve gates, is a bit excessive. But here of course, we get a city, whose wall, is not for protection. It is God, who protects it. Twelve gates, the number that occurs, periodically in Revelation, often symbolizes, the completeness, of God's people.

Twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles of Jesus, is what's perhaps, behind it. On the gates, were written, the names of the twelve, tribes of Israel, making clear, why there's number twelve.

Three gates, east, north, south, and west. It's open, in all directions. We'll see, in a minute, that people can come in, from every nation, and so on. So this is a symbol, of the openness, of the gospel, to the world.

It is not a western gospel. It is not an eastern gospel. It's not a northern hemisphere gospel, or a European gospel, or an Australian gospel. It is a gospel, for the world, for every direction, where people live, and come from.

[23 : 23] The wall of the city, had twelve foundations. The word might mean, buttresses, as though, in between each gate, there is a particular, sort of, tower bit of the wall. If you know, ancient walls, they often, sort of, go, in a sense, thin for a while, and then there's a bit of a tower, and then it's thin for a while.

It's probably, what it's talking about, the sort of buttress, or foundation, or tower part of the wall.

There are twelve of those, presumably, alternating with the twelve gates. So you've got twelve gates, that symbolise the Old Testament tribes, as was already made clear, and on these foundations, we have the names, of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, that is, of Jesus.

What it's a statement of, is the unity, and continuity, of Old and New Testament. Therefore, of God's purposes, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, God's purposes, embrace the whole of history, the whole of, the Bible story, if you like.

It's not as though, because we're Christians, the New Testament alone, is our heritage. The Old, is as important, as well. The picture here, is vivid, but it's no different, to the picture, that, Paul has, in Ephesians 2, that Peter has, in 1 Peter 2, and so on.

The church, built on the foundation, of the apostles, and so on. Now, this angel, that's speaking to John, has a measuring rod, and it's of gold. Why gold?

[24 : 40] We're not sure, but very ornate, and precious. And it's to measure the city, its gates, and its walls. And the city, we're told, is laid out as a square, as long as it is wide.

And this angel, measured the city, and found it to be, 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide, and high, as it is long. Now, it's very hard, to imagine, this city.

The modern translations, often change, the measurement, and put it into meters, or kilometers, or something. But in a sense, that loses a little bit, because it's 12,000, and 12 we see, is so often, this number, of perfection, for God's purposes, in tribes, and apostles.

But one stadia, is apparently 607 feet. 12,000 stadia, if you do mental arithmetic, you'll quickly work out, is about 2,250 kilometers. That's the distance, between London, and Athens, roughly, or Melbourne, and maybe Alice Springs, I thought.

That sort of distance. This is a city, that long, and that wide, and that high. We think we've got, modern skyscrapers, in Melbourne, and Malaysia boasts, even taller ones, but this, this is nothing on that.

[25 : 54] You imagine a skyscraper, that's 2,250 kilometers high. That's much higher, than any plane, ever flies. Maybe not as high, as the space satellites, and so on.

You see, this is a picture, that defies imagination, in a sense. It goes beyond, what we can quite perceive, but then, God's like that, isn't he? The God who can do, far more, than ever we imagine.

Well, here's a little illustration, of that. We can't imagine, a city this big. And it's in a stupid, dimension as well. I mean, it's as high, as it is long and wide. But that's saying something.

Some suggest, that if you add up, each of the dimensions, if you, it's cubic, you see, like a dice. And if you add up, each of the lines, at the edges, 12 by 12,000, gives you, sort of a rounded number, which is often perfect, in Revelation.

You actually end up, with 144,000, which is the number, that John was told, back in chapter 7, is there in heaven. Maybe it's saying something, that's linked to that. But, I think it's saying something, a little bit more, subtle for us, perhaps.

[27 : 00] There is a building, that is cubic, and it's an important building, in the Bible. It is the centre, of the temple, the Holy of Holies. What this is saying, you see, is that the new city, the whole city, is like the Holy of Holies, in the old Jerusalem.

That was just a little, tiny bit, in the middle of the city, 60 foot and so on. But this, incorporates the whole city, because as we'll see, the whole temple, is the city, is the people.

You don't now get a temple, in a city, but you rather get the temple, being the city, because God's presence, perfectly indwells, all parts of it. The wall was, 144 cubits thick.

A cubit is the length, of an elbow, to the tip of a finger, by a man's measurement. That's an adult man. That means the walls, were 216 feet thick, which is fairly thick.

Maybe it's a statement, of security. The wall was made, of jasper. Pure gold was a city, as pure as glass. I don't think, I've ever seen gold, that's as pure as glass. But certainly, you see the Holy of Holies, in the old testament, was covered in gold, inside and out.

[28 : 12] This is a bigger picture, of what was there, in the centre, of old Jerusalem. It's also reminding us, of something, that again, the writer to the Hebrews, said in a different way.

That all the institutions, set up on earth, in the old testament, especially the temple, and the tabernacle, and so on, the Holy of Holies, are what he called, shadows, of the reality, in heaven. The temple on earth, is not the end, of God's purpose. It's just a model, of what heaven, is actually like. It's a shadow, and heaven, is the reality.

What an interesting, way of thinking, because we think, earth is the reality, heaven is a sort of, mystic shadow, spiritual sort of existence, that's a bit sort of, hard to grasp. But in God's perspective, it's the other way around.

Heaven's the reality, heaven's what's going to last forever, this earth's just going to pass away, this is transient, almost ephemeral. It is heaven, that is the reality, and earth the shadow.

[29 : 11] And the same, especially with the old, holy of holies, and temple in Jerusalem. Now that also explains, why it was so important, that the old testament Jews, built things, according to the

exact detail, that God gave.

If you read the book of Exodus, it's quite an exciting story, in the first half, lots of plagues, and a great flood of red seas, wiping out an Egyptian army, and so on. Pretty exciting stuff. No wonder, is it Steven Spielberg, is about to make a, no is it, somebody's about to make, a new cartoon movie, of Moses, as one of the great blockbusters.

It's very exciting. But I'll bet you, they don't deal with the second half, of the book of Exodus. That's boring, isn't it? Six or seven chapters, of details, about how to build the tabernacle, and then when you're finished, you get a bit of relief, when all the people sin, and make a golden calf.

It goes and repeats it all, and says that this is what the Israelites did, and then it gives you all the detail again. Now, that's actually there, for a very deliberate reason. Because it shows us, that the Israelites, did exactly what God commanded, and that it was important, that they did it that way.

And this is saying, and along with things like, Hebrews 8 is saying, it's important because, the model of the old temple, the tabernacle, and so on, is a shadow, of what's the reality, in heaven.

[30 : 24] So the Hebrews writer says, they serve at a sanctuary, that is a copy, and shadow, of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned, when he was about to build, the tabernacle, see to it, that you make everything, according to the pattern, shown you on the mountain, that's on Mount Sinai.

Now you see, at last, at the end of the Bible, we get the reality. All through the Bible, we've got the shadow, which seems so important, but it's actually the reality, heaven, that is more important.

Well then, a few more descriptions. Foundations covered, with precious stones, there's a list of 12 stones, some of them you may know, some of them you may not know. Why are they mentioned, does it matter?

Well, 12 stones, these 12 stones, occur again, in the Old Testament, in the same, well not, together, in one group, of 12 stones. In the Old Testament, the high priest, and only the high priest, had to wear, an ephod, a sort of, apron tunic thing, with 12 stones, these 12 stones, embedded in it, when he went into, the Holy of Holies, on the Day of Atonement, with the Atonement sacrifice, once a year.

Now I've never read anywhere, any commentator on Revelation, who said anything, about these stones. But it seems to me, that what it's saying, is this. In the Old Testament, those stones signified, the enormous privilege, that the high priest, alone had, when he could go, into God's very presence, with the Atonement sacrifice, one day a year.

[31 : 56] But now, in heaven, those 12 stones, cover, if you like, every person of God. We all, have even a better privilege, than the high priest, had in the Old Testament.

Because those stones, are around us, all the time, in heaven. We have direct access to God, 365 and a quarter days, of the year, 24 hours a day, not one day a year, on the Day of Atonement, like the high priest, of the Old Testament.

This is a little statement, for those who would have understood, their Old Testaments, to say, how privileged, we as Christian people are, to have direct access, to God, all the time, in heaven.

The description continues, twelve gates, were pearls, made of a single pearl, it's impossible to imagine, such big gates, being single pearls, street of the city, pure gold, like transparent glass, again, it's impossible to imagine, this is indescribable beauty, you see.

We're not meant, to try and pin everything down, it's a vision, a scene, or an impression, of something, that's almost, beyond description, in its beauty. And remember, that it's the church, that's being described.

[33 : 08] It's us, on the final day. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Look around, see, how much gold, of pure glass, can you see here tonight? Not much. But it's a picture of us, on the final day, perfect, in God's sight.

John then says, that he didn't see, a temple in this city. That would be noticeable, because in the Old Testament days, and in John's own day, the temple dominated, the skyscape, or the sky scene, of Jerusalem.

If you go to Jerusalem today, it's the Dome of the Rock, and it's still very dominant, even in modern Jerusalem. Even more so, was the old temple. If you went to Jerusalem, there it was, staring at you, from virtually every angle, in the first century.

But for John, there's no temple. And he knows why. Because the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. You see, we don't need a temple in heaven. The temple was a sort of, means of

having access to God.

But in this heaven, God's there. Perfectly, totally, directly. No need for a temple. The whole thing is, in a sense, a temple, of God's presence, in and with his people.

[34 : 22] It's also a reminder to us, I guess, that for Christians, we don't look for, or need, holy places. Unlike Muslims, and Jews today, who look for, and have holy places, that they are prepared, to give their lives over, and fight for, for Christians, though there is something special, about some places, in the world, there's nothing, that's absolutely holy.

Because it's we, in Christ, who are the temple. Not a building, made of bricks, and mortar. The city doesn't need, sun or moon, because God's glory, gives it all the light, it needs.

And the lamb is its lamp. Even better, than the original creation, when God made light, the sun, the moon, and the stars. None of that, is needed here. When it says, for the glory of God, gives its light, and the lamb is its lamp, it's alluding back, to the end of Isaiah, a statement about God.

And when it says, the lamb is its lamp, it's assuming, that the lamb, Jesus Christ is divine. It's another of those, allusions that, the book of Revelation, is full of, that show that it, it expects in every way, Jesus to be absolutely, and totally divine.

To be God, to be worshipped. Throw that one, at the next Jehovah's Witness, that comes by you. The nations will walk, by its light. That is, it's not just the nations, who are pouring in, who do whatever they want.

[35 : 42] These are nations, walking by the light of God. And the kings of the earth, will bring their splendor, into it. Yes, it's a gospel for all, but it's not necessarily, going to be for everybody in there.

It's for those, who walk by the light of God. And on no day, will the gates ever be shut. There'll be no night there. Nighttime, in ancient cities, the doors will be closed, the guards will be put out.

Not needed here. God is the protection, we need. And that's all. The glory and honour of the nations, will be brought into it. Nothing impure will enter it, nor will anyone who does, what's shameful or deceitful, all the things mentioned, in that earlier verse.

But only those, whose names are written, in the Lamb's Book of Life. What assurance for Christian people, whose names are written there, that they belong here. Well, when we come to chapter 22, John now sees another aspect, of the city.

This time the river of life, or the river of the water of life. The city of Manningham, is wanting to call Doncaster Road, the river of life. When they do that, I'm tempted to put up, a great big banner, along the bottom of the church property.

[36 : 49] Jesus is the river of life, not Doncaster Road. It's a picture, that comes from the Garden of Eden. The river of life, flowed through the Garden of Eden, and here again, is the same river of life.

Not just water, not just providing physical life, but of course, it's talking about eternal life, and life with God forever. Throughout the Bible, there are pictures of the river of life. Psalm 46, the end of Ezekiel again, the water of life, flowing from his picture of the temple.

And again, it alludes to John's offer, of water of life, to the woman at the well, and in John chapter 7 as well. It reminds us that life, comes from God. And that real life, is godly life.

Not just physical existence, on this earth. We cling to this life so much, but as Christians, we must remember that, the life that we enjoy, is eternal life now, in a relationship with God.

And it's that, that we must cling to, more than physical life. Down, this river flowed through, from the throne of God, so it comes from God.

[37 : 54] Flows down the middle, of the great street, of the city. Tree of life, on either side. Again, something that comes, from the Garden of Eden, back in Genesis 2. The tree that initially, Adam and Eve, were allowed to eat, but once they ate, of the forbidden tree, of the knowledge of good, and evil, then they were prevented, from the tree of life.

But now at last, is that prevention reversed. Now at last, in the last chapter, of the Bible, are God's people, able to eat, of the tree of life again. And that bears crops, all through the year, and the leaves, are for the healing, of the nations.

But the word, that's used here, for the tree of life, is an unusual word. It's not the normal word, for tree. The word, zulon, is actually a word, that's used more, for dead wood.

It's the word, that's used for a club, when Jesus was going, to be arrested, and they carried a club.

It's a word, that's used, for trees, it's sometimes, costly wood, and so on.

But generally speaking, it's a word, that's used for dead wood. Now what does it, symbolize, it seems to me? The tree of life, is the cross.

[39 : 00] The tree of life, is that lump of wood, that dead wood, on which Jesus, was crucified. It was a living tree, I think a different word, would have been used. But it's the word, that's used in a number, of places in the New Testament, for the cross.

So it's there, that eternal life is found, in the cross of Jesus Christ. And what an irony, that is. That our life, forever, is found, where he died.

His death, is what brings us, our life. And the tree of life, is the cross, of Jesus death. Early Christian art, used often, to symbolize, the cross, as the tree of life, and vice versa.

And that's what, this is a picture of. Here at the heart of heaven, and where the source, of life derives, is the cross of Christ. Notice also, that it's for the healing, of the nations, for all nations. Fulfilling God's, initial purpose in creation, fulfilling the promises, that he made to Abraham, back in Genesis 12, that all nations, would be blessed, through him and his seed. And it's true.

[40 : 10] Thousands, and thousands of years, after Abraham, those promises, are perfectly fulfilled, in Jesus Christ. No more curse, that is the curse, after the sin, of God, and Eden, when Adam and Eve, were expelled, from the garden.

The ground was cursed, the serpent was cursed, their work and toil, were cursed. All gone now, in this new heaven, and new earth. The throne of God, and of the Lamb, will be in the city, and his servants, will serve him.

The word to serve, is perhaps in your translation, worship. It's the same word, when we talk about, going to church, for a worship service, we're actually using, a tautology. Worship and service, in Greek, are the same words.

But heaven is not just a place, for endless chorus singing, and liturgical practices, and so on. It's more, you see worship is more than, what we do on a Sunday morning, worship is about serving God, fulfilling God's will, for us in our lives.

I often object to, those in leading church, who say now we have, a time of worship. The whole time in church, should be worship, whether we're listening to the sermon, reading the Bible, or even over our fellowship, after the service.

[41 : 23] But indeed, our whole lives are worship. Going to work, on a Monday morning, is our act of worship to God, as much as gathering, on a Sunday and so on. Because all of our life, is to be in service, and worship, of an almighty God.

This verse also reminds us, that heaven is not, a place of idleness. If you're trying to, if you picture heaven, as sort of being, a Fiji holiday, well, I'm sorry to disappoint you. I don't think it'll be, the toil and sweat, of the brow, that humanity's endured, since Adam's sin.

But nonetheless, there'll be, people of God, fulfilling the will of God, in heaven. They'll be full of joy, and probably some ease, but it is not idleness, either.

But also, this note, of the servants, serving, or worshipping God, is also probably, appropriate in John's day. Because the great pressure, on Christians, was to worship the emperor, or worship the state, or worship another God.

So, when they would be persecuted, maybe their houses, or groups were broken into, the guards, presumably, as they do in all sorts, of dictatorships, over the years, would say, now bow down, and worship the emperor, or bow down, and worship Zeus, or some other God.

[42 : 36] The test, you see, was often a test, of worship. And for Christians, then as now, we cannot share, our worship of God, with any other, make believe God, or idol. God demands, exclusive worship.

So you see, the importance of worship here. It's to remind, those Christians, who are struggling, to be faithful to God, that God will be faithful, to them. And that heaven is theirs.

So keep, worshipping God. No one else. These people in heaven, will see God's face, his name, will be on their foreheads, a reminder again, of the assurance, of God choosing them, they can rely upon God.

There will be no more night, as we've seen, they won't need any light, etc. For God will give them light, and they will reign, forever and ever. We think of Christ reigning, maybe we think of the saints, in some position of authority, the special people, of God maybe.

But you see, for all Christian people, we will reign, crowned by the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, himself. And then the angel, said again to John, these are trustworthy, true words.

[43 : 46] The Lord, the God of his spirit, God of the spirits, of the prophets, sent his angel, to show his servants, the things that must soon, take place. Now we return to earth, with those words.

John's had this vision, of heaven, but now he's back, in the first century AD, now he's back, thinking of the churches, that he's been asked, to write to, and convey these words. Reminds us that, the book of Revelation, is in the end an epistle.

In the end, it's a letter, to churches, urging them, to be persevering, in godly faith, in the face of persecution. And so what we find, at the very end of the book, recapitulates so much, of the first three chapters, which are the letters, to the churches, before the visions begin.

We'll see a bit of that, in a few minutes. But the themes, that are running through here, as they've run through, the whole book, assurance, faith, hope, perseverance. Behold, I'm coming soon.

Jesus' words now. Not just God, the Father's, or the angels, but Jesus' own words. Blessed is he, who keeps the words, of the prophecy, in this book. He's coming soon.

[44 : 52] A note that's, repeated in verse 12, and then again later on, in verse 20. And that he's coming, is emphasised in this chapter, seven times. It says that Jesus is coming, or coming soon.

But notice also, what the blessed bit says. Blessed is he, not who reads these words, not even those who go to a Bible study, about these words. Blessed is he, who obeys, or keeps, the words. For in the end, God's words, are for our obedience, not our information. I, John, am the one who heard, and saw these things. And when he saw, and heard them, he fell down, to worship at the feet, of the angel.

The same mistake, as we saw last week, maybe. Maybe it's an illustration, of what not to do. It's drawing certainly, out the point, of how important it is, to worship God, and God alone. Not an emperor, not another created being, whether an angel, or human.

But to worship God. So the angel, tells him off, don't do it. I'm a fellow servant, with you, your brother's, the prophets of all, who keep the words, of this book, worship God. Much the same, as what we saw last week, in chapter 19, verse 10.

[46 : 04] Then he said to me, don't seal up the words, of this prophecy, because the time is near. Daniel was given, a series of visions, in the Old Testament. He was told, to seal them up, because they were, about the future.

But these, are to be kept open. The book is for, John's readers. The book is for, John's day and age. And for days and ages, that follow. But the book is for now, not, not the time to come.

It's not a book, for the future. Verse 11's a puzzle, isn't it? When you heard it read, I wonder what you thought of it.

Let the person who does wrong, continue to do wrong. That's not giving permission. It's not saying, oh, it's okay, you do what you like. It's not a post-modern type of, idea here, at the end of the Bible. But rather, it's an acknowledgement, that the end has come.

And it's too late to change. So the one who does wrong, will continue to do wrong. The warnings have been and gone, in those middle chapters of Revelation. They've been unheeded. It's too late, at this end point, to change.

[47 : 09] Behold, I'm coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone, according to what he's done. Judgment, as we saw, last week and the week before. Reminding us, that our actions, attitudes, and thoughts, are all important to God, who sees and knows all.

It also reminds us, that the grace that we've received, that saves us, is not cheap. It demands a response, of godly obedience, as well. Now remember, these are Jesus words, at this point.

So the next verse, is stunning. I, and the Alpha, and the Omega. Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Earlier in the chapter, and at the beginning of the book of Revelation, it is God, who is the Alpha and Omega.

But it is Jesus, who is the same. Again, a clear understanding, that Jesus is God. A clear understanding, that he is divine. There's no escaping that, in the book of Revelation.

I think there's no escaping it, in any other book, of the New Testament either. Jesus is God, and God to be worshipped. 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.

[48 : 21] Here's how you get in, not through what you do, but through Jesus. Through having your robes, washed in his blood. Metaphorically speaking, about our sins, being forgiven through him.

It's only those, who are forgiven, who get there. Not those who are good, or perfect. It is Jesus, who is the access to the city. He is the one, through whom we can go in. But this also, of course, being a picture, of the end of heaven, is a picture, not just of our initial, conversion or forgiveness, but a picture, of our sanctification, that is our made perfect, or blameless, or spotless, or holy in God's

sight.

And again, it's Jesus who does that. From beginning to end, it is Jesus, who is our salvation. And there's no other means, no other way, by which we can enter, into heaven.

Sin is overcome, through Jesus and him alone. And the gates are open, so that anyone can enter. The gospel is for all, even if all do not respond to it.

Outside of the dogs. I'd be pleased about that, I'm not really a dog lover. But the dogs, we're told here, are those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, everyone who loves, and practices falsehood.

[49 : 40] Not those who, perhaps the Christians, who somehow fall, once and then repent, and so on. But those who keep on, in those practices. Dogs, in the Old Testament, is a term that's sometimes used, for male cult prostitutes.

That is men or boys, who would go to the temples, and have sexual acts, with different people, men or women, for the sake of indulging, the God's pleasure. In the New Testament, sometimes the dogs, are the heathen.

So it's a fairly derogatory term, of those who are not Christians. But the warning here, that those who, practice such immoral things, are not part of heaven, is a warning that, should challenge us perhaps.

But also a reminder to us, that even in the end, there is a great divide, between those who are Christians, and those who are not. And that's the one division, that lasts forever. I, Jesus, have sent my angel, to give you this testimony, for the churches.

I'm the root, and the offspring of David, the bright morning star. Words that, come from bits of the Old Testament, showing that he's the root, that is the ancestor of David, but he's also the offspring, the descendant of David.

[50 : 50] Because Jesus was there, in the beginning, but he's also of course, humanly speaking, descended from David. Words that come, from early chapters of Isaiah. Words that are picked up, earlier on in Revelation, chapter 5.

The spirit and the bride, say come. The church itself, inviting others to join it, is what that's saying. You see at the end of the Bible, we get an evangelistic message. The church, inviting other people, to come to Christ.

Even in the midst of persecution, there is still the demand, for evangelism. And let him who hears, say come. Whoever is thirsty, let him come. And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift, an emphatic word, of the water of life.

The book of Revelation, as you see to us, a challenge to evangelism. We're the bride, we're the church, so let us be inviting the world, to come to Jesus Christ, before it's too late, to escape the judgment, that is theirs, if they do not come.

To come to the one, who offers the free water, of eternal life, without cost. That's our command. Now. Before it's too late, for those who are not part, of the church.

[52 : 02] God provides the ticket. We don't pay to get in. We're extending God's ticket, or invitation, to others to come to Christ. John warns everyone, who hears the words, not to add to them, and not to subtract from them.

I don't think he means that, in a sort of, trivial way, as though, you know, you find a copy, and the I's not dotted, or there's a spelling mistake, and you've got to correct something, or whatever. I don't think he's meaning that, in a sort of, narrowly, trivial way.

I think what he's saying, is the gospel here. You can't add to it, and don't just, don't detract from it. And yet, throughout every age of history, there are people, who've done exactly that. Who said, yes, the gospel is Jesus, plus something else, plus getting circumcised, or plus going to the right sort of church, or plus having the books of Joseph Smith, or some other crazy heretic guru, or those who've detracted from Jesus, saying, well, yes, Jesus, but you don't really need all of that.

I mean, there's a bit of this, and this, and so on. Plenty of people say those sorts of things. But this is saying, don't change the gospel. Jesus is all we need, not something else, and not something less.

He's all we need, and we need all of him. And we cannot, and must not, change that. We need to remember, that the book of Revelation, is written to seven churches.

[53 : 30] Maybe it was to more churches, but seven are mentioned, and there are seven letters at the beginning. It's to encourage them under persecution, to persevere.

It's to rebuke, those who are falling away from faith, whether under provocation of Rome, or through other means. It's to encourage purity, and holiness in living.

And it's to challenge them, to share the gospel with others. The last two chapters of the book, echo time and time again, words and phrases, from the first three chapters, which are explicitly the letters.

And indeed, if you look through those first three chapters, and for Holy Trinity people, I'm preaching through them, in March, in the evening services, to each church, there's the challenge to overcome. And the promise that's associated to each one, is here in the last two chapters of the book. To eat the tree of life, not to be hurt by the second death, to have a new name, a white stone, to be the morning star, to be dressed in white, to have their names in the book of life, to be part of the new Jerusalem, to sit on the throne.

[54 : 39] All of those, which are the seven churches, in chapters two and three, are here at the end. It's a challenge to us, to overcome, through the one who overcomes, that is Jesus Christ. And all of this is ours.

John's final words, he who testifies to these things, says, yes, I am coming soon. Yes, it's happening soon. Be ready. Be urgent. I saw today a little slogan, Jesus is coming soon, so look busy.

Well, I think Jesus sees beyond, what we look like. And our affirmation to that is, Amen, come Lord Jesus. Our urgency and desires, for him to come, and bring about the completion, and consummation, of all God's purposes, for this universe.

And then comes, and those words, come Lord Jesus, are one of the very, very few prayers, in the Bible, in the New Testament, to Jesus. Virtually every prayer, bar two, or maybe three, are prayers to God the Father.

St Stephen, before he's martyred, prays to Jesus, and here is another, and there's hardly any others. The grace of the Lord Jesus, be with God's people. Amen.

[55 : 52] The final words, words of grace. You see friends, in times of trial, in times of prosperity, in times of persecution, in any time, God's grace, is sufficient.

It is all we need, and that grace, is found in Jesus Christ, and his death, and resurrection. From beginning to end, the Christian life, is a life of grace.

We don't begin it by grace, and complete it by our own works, and under our own steam. It begins and it ends, by God's grace. John Newton, got it right, didn't he?

His grace, first taught our hearts to fear. His grace, our fears relieved. And then, his grace has brought us safe, thus far, and grace will lead us home.

One of the difficulties we face, in the book of Revelation, is we don't face persecution. The issues aren't sharp for us, because we, by and large, are complacent, in the 1990s, in Australia, as Christian people.

[56 : 56] We think so much, this worldly, that this life, this world, these possessions, these buildings, these things around us, are all that matters. That's the reality.

But Revelation says, hang on a minute, the reality is to come. These are just shadows. The words we're about to sing, say this, fading, fading, are the world's best pleasures, all its boasted pomp and show, solid joys, and lasting treasures, none but Zion's children know.

Jesus' grace, is all we need, from beginning, to end. Saviour, since of Zion's city, I through grace, a member am.

Let the world deride, or pity, I will glory, in your name. Let's stand and sing, those great words, in number 494, in the blue hymn books.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.