

The New Beginning of God's Final Order

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[0 : 00] Well, turn back with me to the first passage we read in the book of Revelation, page 1041 of our church Bibles, Revelation 21.

And this evening I just want to consider with you the first two verses of chapter 21, what John saw in his vision.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Now, those of you who were here last Lord's Day even remember we were looking at the return of the Lord Jesus as Jesus proclaimed towards the end of Matthew's Gospel.

And we looked at the promise of that return as Jesus was telling of the second coming, of his return to earth. And we noticed three things about that promised return.

[1 : 17] We noticed, first of all, the fact of his coming. He said, you know, when the Son of Man returns, so this is the Lord Jesus speaking, this is the infallible Son of God.

So when Jesus says he is coming, when the Son of Man returns, when he returns, then we know this is fact, this is truth. He is returning, he's coming again.

And then we notice something else. We notice the manner of his coming. We were told that he will come in his glory with all the angels.

And then, third of all, we notice that the purpose of his coming, as Jesus said, to judge the world in righteousness. Jesus will come again to exercise his justice, his righteous justice.

Justice according to how people have responded to him in life. Whether you've received him as Lord and Saviour, or whether you've continued to reject Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

[2 : 24] And in that, either accepting or rejecting, then the purpose of Jesus' coming will be revealed in that great division at the end of time between those who are his and those who are not.

And as we were looking at these words of Jesus, telling of his promised return, we were very aware of the urgency of a response to Jesus' words.

Because if Jesus, and since Jesus is returning, then we ought to be ready for that return. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, it's for you to be ready.

To be ready in holiness, to be ready in faithfulness, to be ready in your heart. Even as, you know, from the heart you cry out, even so Lord, come Lord Jesus.

But if you don't yet know Jesus as your Saviour, then the warnings of the consequences of rejecting Jesus as Saviour, the warnings are there before you.

[3 : 25] As Jesus says, he'll separate the whole of humanity as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And in that division, on that last day, there'll be no altering, no altering that division.

There'll be no second chances. The division will be seen and the division will be permanent. The sheep of Christ's flock to know eternal life, eternal bliss, the eternal bliss of eternal life in the new heaven and the new earth, within the new Jerusalem.

And I will explain all that in a moment. But the goats outside, the goats outside the flock of Christ, doomed to eternal destruction, separate from God and separate from true believers in Jesus.

And it's that prospect of eternity. That's what we're going to continue our thoughts on this evening. Because, to get where we've read, of course, part of this vision that John received when he was in exile in the island of Patmos.

Patmos is a little island, a very small island in the Aegean Sea. And in that tiny Greek island, he sees an expanse of vision.

[4 : 38] A vision that covers the end of the world. In that tiny island, he sees into eternity. He sees into the vast, renewed cosmos of a new heaven and a new earth.

And he sees what he was permitted to see in vision. And he hears what he was permitted to hear in receiving that vision. But it's what every believer will see in reality when Jesus returns and what every believer will hear when Jesus returns.

But even now, you'd still see and hear by faith. Even now, through the word of God, you're seeing. You're seeing what John saw in vision. You're seeing by faith what John saw in his vision. You're seeing by faith what one day you who know him will see in your glorified body. It will be all glorious. All wonderful.

It will be wonder upon wonder and every wonder true. And it's that wonder of the revelation that John saw. We see it's towards the end of his vision.

[5 : 47] That's what we're going to focus on this evening. And really, these wonderful words of vision that we'll look at under this one heading. Three parts, but one heading.

What John saw. What John saw. Now, in a few weeks' time, God willing, I'm away next Lord's Day. Then there's the communion service the week after. So three weeks' time, we'll look at what John heard.

But first of all, what John saw. Read again quietly to yourself verses 1 and 2. I noticed the first thing that John saw was a new heaven and a new earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, but the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Now, we obviously need to seek to understand what John is seeing here in his vision.

But let's just, you know, let's just get our bearings here. Because in all the preceding chapters, all the very difficult chapters, but in the preceding chapters of the book of Revelation, what do we read?

[6 : 49] We read that every one of Christ's enemies have been defeated. Every one of the enemies, Jesus' enemies defeated. There's no longer any opposition to God and his people. And the reign of Jesus is seen in all its triumph and all its victory.

So with that victory seen, established, the scene's now set to reveal the coming of the Lord Jesus. To reveal the coming of Jesus and all his glory and his glorious appearing.

And he'll make all things new. And he'll reveal his absolute authority as king, as judge and as saviour. And that will be seen in what we might call a cosmic act of renewal.

That's what John sees in his vision. He sees a new heaven and a new earth. Why? Because the first heaven and the first earth have passed away. And you say, well, what do we make of this amazing revelation? Well, we're reading of the greatest act of restoration and the greatest act of renewal.

As somebody has written, we're reading of paradise restored. All that was ruined in the old heaven and the old earth. In other words, what we're living in now.

[8 : 00] All that to be repaired and beautified in the new. And there's a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away. So let's look at this renewal.

This renewal. And what's been renewed? It's the first heaven and the first earth. Where we are now. What we are now. What we've been since the beginning of time.

Well, since man's fall. Remember what we read in Genesis 1. When God created the heavens and the earth. God made a perfect heaven. A perfect heaven.

A perfect universe. A perfect earth. God made earth for man to dwell in. So that man would nurture it. Enjoy it. Populate it. A perfect fellowship with God the creator in that situation.

What do we read in Genesis 1? Or something in Genesis. Early Genesis. We see that sin came into the human heart. And when sin came into the human heart.

[9 : 03] The whole of creation itself was tarnished. Mankind lost that intimate fellowship with God. Mankind became corrupt. The earth became corrupted. The heavens and the earth affected by sin.

Earthquakes. Volcanic eruptions. Natural disasters. Drought. Ecological disasters. Decay. Decay setting in. But even in the midst of that decay.

As we read in the Old Testament. There's promise of restoration. Restoring of man's relationship with God. For example in Isaiah 65 verse 17. God declares. For behold I create new heavens.

And a new earth. And the former things shall not be remembered. Or come into mind. So what are we seeing in this vision of John? We're seeing this. That the sin ravaged cosmos.

The decaying world. We're told will pass away. All the ruin of man's sin. That ruin that's affected every aspect of the universe. Is going to be restored.

[10:08] To its Eden like perfection. The old will become new. God's going to transform the old world. He's going to transform the old universe.

He's going to turn it into something glorious. And sin free. Paradise restored. Fresh life as somebody said. Fresh life rising from the decay and ruin of the old world. The world as we know it now. God's transforming power. Well we'll be seeing in every believer being restored. Having that perfect fellowship with God. And one with another. In that perfection of glory. In the new heaven. In the new earth. Now of course. At the moment.

On one side. You can't really perceive. You know. Of that renewal. In sinless perfection. I mean. Even you know. In our fellowship one with another.

[11:08] Even you know. In our daily lives. There's sin in our hearts. In my heart. We don't know even perfection. When it comes to communion with God. Because we fail so often.

We grieve the Holy Spirit. We neglect the things of God. We're thinking this morning of the idol of self. We can so have that idol of self at the centre. Rather than have the Lord Jesus at the centre. Sin so mars our fellowship with God. And one with another. Here we're told that God's going to make all things new. And the new earth will be the location for sinless relationships. Whether it be with God. With one another. You see. What a prospect. I may have mentioned this before. But certainly. I was growing up in Edinburgh.

I remember. The late Professor Clement Graham. Praying. Praying in a midweek meeting. And he said something like this. And I'm going back. Actually over 40 years now. But something like this. We wonder.

[12:14] If we'll recognise ourselves. In the glory of heaven. We wonder if we'll recognise ourselves. In the glory of heaven. Now. Bring that to what we're seeing here. About the new heaven.

And the new earth. In a renewed body. In a renewed earth. Where sin's pollution will be no more. We can't fully perceive what that's going to be like.

What perfection's going to be like. But we believe by faith. That that perfection will be a reality. So. While we see this. Old world.

This world that we're living in. While we're seeing it decay and decay. At the same time. We can have that utter confidence. To know that decay isn't permanent.

There will be. That new heaven and new earth. And that will restore. Be restored. What Adam. Ruined by sin. There'll be that removal of all.

[13:10] That sin polluted. There'll be no more sorrow. No more hurt. No more pain. No more struggles. No more enmity.

One with another. No more sin. There'll be a glorious resumption. Of close fellowship with God. Now just think of that. Just. You know.

For a moment. Just take that into your heart. Is that thrilling your heart? Well. It should. Because. You know. As God's word tells us. You have eternity in your heart.

Within your heart. Well. Realize what John's describing here. In vision. It's of. An eternity. That every Christian. Should long for.

Newness of life. In all its fullness. An eternity of. Sinless perfection. A renewed. Restored. Creation. That perfection. Of the created order.

[14:05] In which. There'll be no more decay. You know. Think of everything you see around you. Just now. But will you think of the new heaven. And the new earth. Will be perfect color. Perfect shape.

Perfect design. Perfect animal life. Perfect humanity. In our glorified bodies. Paul tells us. In 1 Corinthians 15. Of the. Our glorious bodies.

In. In. In. In what God does. For his people. And it's that. Picture of God's. Perfect renewal. That. John sees here in vision.

A new heaven. And a new earth. But then he says. Secondly. What else does he see. In vision. He sees. No more see. No more see. He sees. No more see. Then we've got to work out.

What's John seeing here. And often when we're stuck. You go to scripture. Scripture. Interpret scripture. And it might seem. A strange thing to say.

[15:00] I saw no more see. When he's describing. The new heaven. And the new earth. But. What does the old testament. Tell us about. The sea. Well. Often it tells us. That the sea. Was a

symbol.

Of division. Separation. The sea. The sea. Didn't just geographically. Divide nations. It was a symbol of this. You know. This nation. Against nation. And the sea.

Was also. At times. A place of terror. Place of. Restless destruction. So. In the old testament. We see that picture.

Of the sea. That the symbol. Of destruction. And separation. And we. See God. Rebuking the sea. You know. The storms. The dangers. The travelers. And often.

Symbolized. The conflict. Between nations. And we read. In the old testament. Of God. Stilling the roaring. Of the seas. The roaring. Of the waves. And so the sea.

[15:54] So often. Spoke of. Enmity. Enmity. Of man. Against God. But. Of course. We're told. That God's mightier. Than the waters.

God's sovereign. Over all. And he's able. To calm. The mighty waters. He conquers. And subdues. His enemies. Now. There's John himself.

Of course. He's on an island. He's an exile. In an island. He knows. Geographical separation. From his. Brothers and sisters. In Christ. He knows. That the sea itself.

Was causing separation. So. When he sees no more sea. In his vision. Then. He's saying. Well he can see that. You know. In that future. For eternity.

That there'll be permanent peace. To man and man. And man and God. All divisions. No more. Perfect fellowship. Restored.

[16:49] Between God and man. Perfect love. Between God and man. Man and God. And perfect fellowship. Between. Well one to another. No more wars.

No more tears. No more hurt. No more pain. No more pain. Now of course. That. That. John sees that in vision. He sees a future prospect. Of. Perfect bliss.

Bliss. Bliss. Bliss. In a. In renewed. Sinless relationships. But you know. That should actually impact us. Now. Even now. And I think.

In several ways. But even now. To live in the light. Of that eternal perfection. But even seeking now. Be peacemakers. You know.

When Jesus said. Blessed are those. Those are the peacemakers. And you know. When we think even now. Of divisions. Between Christians. That's an affront.

[17:45] To the God of peace. So. Be those who are. Peacemakers. People who build bridges. Rather than create division. Between believers. And let's be those.

Who seek to restore relationships. Relationships. Because even when there are. Restrained relationships. Between brothers and sisters. In Christ. You be a peacemaker. You be a bridge builder. Be that in anticipation.

Of what John sees here. When he says. There'll be no more sea. And then. Something else. I think. To consider. In relation to this. This vision. Because it does happen.

You will suffer. Heart and pain. In air. And so often. We say it with sadness. But so often. That pain and distress. Is caused by fellow believers.

But then remember. The prospect. Of no more sea. No more division. Read it elsewhere. In scripture. This light. Momentary affliction. Is preparing for us.

[18:48] An eternal weight of glory. Beyond all comparison. So be a peacemaker. A bridge builder. Yes. Yes. Even when you do suffer.

The pain and hurt. From fellow believers. You remember. That eternal prospect. No more sea. And you know. When you walk with God. How often.

Do I. How often. Do you. Break fellowship with God. When we sin. You know. When we have other gods. Before God. But remember.

In the new earth. There'll be no more sea. And that truly tells us. Of that perfect relationship. That perfect fellowship. With God. That relationship. That's not going to be tainted. By sin and rebellion. Again. Your walk. In the new heaven. In the new earth. In the new earth. Your walk with God. Will be sin free. It will be pure. Because. Your eyes.

[19:43] Will have been made pure. To see. The Lord Jesus Christ. The. The savior. whom you followed in this life and follow eternally in the new heaven and the new earth.

So John saw a vision, new heaven and new earth, so there's no sea. But he sees something else in this vision.

He sees something wonderful. He sees something altogether glorious. He sees something coming out of heaven itself, coming from God. What does he see as we saw in verse 2?

Who sees a new city? He sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for a husband. Now, what's John speaking of here when he speaks of the new Jerusalem? Well, surely he's speaking of the church, the church of Christ, the glorious church that's going to inhabit the new heaven and the new earth.

[20 : 44] You know, you go back to the Old Testament, you read there of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was called the holy city. Well, it's where the temple was. It's where God was worshipped.

It's where animal sacrifices were offered, offered to God. But, of course, the Jewish people, they fell from a wholehearted, true worship of God.

And the city became far from holy. People became disobedient. So, when we're speaking here of the church as the new Jerusalem, we're speaking here of that place where God dwells with his people in true holiness.

And, you see, the language here that's used to describe the church, it's important just to grasp. Because John sees the church as the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for a husband. Now, in a month's time, maybe we'll go back, we'll go further on into chapter 21, and we'll see there that John sees in vision that more fully the new Jerusalem and the church being described in all its fullness.

[21 : 55] In verse 9, John is still in a vision. John is led by an angel, he's led to a high mountain, and he's told there he's to see the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the Lamb of God.

And he sees the bride, he sees the bride, of course, symbolized by the new Jerusalem, sees the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, from God. And you say, why is the church described as a bride?

In fact, not just a bride, but a beautiful bride. Well, I think quite simply this, comparing the church as the bride of Christ speaks of that intimate love relationship that exists between Jesus and his church.

and you know, again, you go back to the Old Testament and you see that made clear. You know, the relationship between God and his people is given in terms of marriage.

Isaiah 62, verse 5, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. Or you go to the New Testament, Ephesians 5, 25, Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

[23 : 05] So, in this vision that John sees, he sees the church, he sees the purified, perfected church coming down from heaven, church, as I said, where the souls of God's people have been, and this wonderful vision that we see here of the church.

He's been permitted to see this beautiful vision, the church in glory, the church wedded to his husband, Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Jesus, who so loved his people, his church, that he gave himself for it. Now, as I say, in a few weeks' time, we'll look at what else is said of the church, certainly from verse 9 onwards.

But, you know, just focus for the moment on what John's seeing, what John's recording, because he was so moved to write down what he saw, he was so utterly taken by what he saw in his vision, that God enabling him, he had to write this down.

And, you know, what we have been looking at so far is wonderful, is marvellous. I mean, the church compared to both a city and a bride, the church in its perfected state, it's shown both to be the place where God dwells, where there's people in perfect harmony, and the church is seen to be a bride in that perfectly pure, intimate relationship with the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 36] So, the church is seen in relation to a city and in relation to a bride, you've got this picture of unity, you've got this picture of union with Christ, this intimacy, this closeness.

closeness. So, the church and God, the church and Jesus. You're seeing this in this perfect harmony, this perfect unity. Again, we keep using the word wonderful because that's what we're seeing here in this vision.

though I know when we think of the church at the moment, perhaps we don't see the church in perfect unity, perfect harmony. When I speak of the church, I'm talking about the wider church because we have to say, sad to say, even when we look at the church's past, we see many divisions, conflict, the church often been so ineffective before a raging world, history of tensions, not

really the beauty that we're seeing here when John sees the church being described as the bride of Christ, the new Jerusalem.

But remember this, the glorified church will be beautiful. Why? Because it will be the bride of Christ. There'll be that eternal love relationship with the Lord Jesus.

There'll be that new Jerusalem, the holy city. Because all who will be within that holy city will be holy. And therefore worthy, worthy to be the bride.

[26 : 11] As God has chosen the church to be his bride. Nothing less, nothing less will be the perfect bride for the saviour of the world than a holy, purified, perfect church.

And that surely points us to this. That all that we've been looking at so far, all we've been thinking about the new heaven and the new earth, all that we've read about the old heaven and old earth passing away, the sea no more, all that we've read about the church, the church being the new Jerusalem and the beautiful bride of Christ.

What does this tell us? What's this telling us all? It's telling us that this is all of God. He will do this. Why? Because of his love for the church.

And you know, when we realise the perfection of holiness that God is, when you realise the blessings, the eternal blessings that the church has promised in the new heaven and the new earth, what's your response?

It has to be to bow down before God and to give him praise now. You know, give him the glory now for what we've been permitted to see through John's vision.

[27 : 31] You know, have that anticipation of glory now as you prepare even for the new heaven and the new earth. This is all of God.

It's all of God's initiative. It's only possible, and it will be only possible, because of the love of God for unworthy sinners such as myself and such as yourselves.

It's because of the love of God demonstrated in the giving to Lord Jesus Christ for us. You know, just focus again on the Lord Jesus in his life, in his death, and his resurrection.

By that life, by his death, by his resurrection, he has made it possible for you and for me, for all for whom Jesus came to win salvation.

He's made it possible for this new order to happen. So what we've just read there in the first two verses, these first two verses, then direct what we've read to Jesus.

[28 : 30] He has made all this possible, because without God's initiative in love, without the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus for us, without his love for you and for me, there'd be no heaven and new earth, there'd be no new Jerusalem, there'd be no bride of Christ, there'd be no enjoying an eternal relationship with a loving Savior.

As we said, what John saw in vision, you see by faith. And therefore, there has to be a response to what you're seeing. doesn't it cause you to rejoice?

And to look beyond even this first heaven and first earth, and to look beyond to the glory of what's to come in the new heaven and the new earth.

Because that truly tells us this, this isn't, this earth, this isn't the end of our lives. Yes, there's a heaven before us for the souls of all who are God's people before Christ returns, where our souls will pass into glory as we await the return of the Lord Jesus.

So there's that immediate prospect of our souls entering the glory of heaven, and there's that further prospect of these glorified souls being reunited with our glorified bodies when the Lord Jesus returns and our bodies are resurrected to join, to be united with our souls.

[30 : 02] And so, the question remains, saying, will you be there? Will you be within the new Jerusalem? Will you join with the myriad, the millions and millions and millions of believers and join with one another as the bride of Christ?

Will you know that eternal bliss and that eternal relationship with our loving Savior? or will you be an outsider? Will you be an outsider without hope?

An outsider without the love of Jesus? An outsider without the perfection of glory? Now, I know much of what we've said this evening can be difficult to follow, difficult to understand, but you know, even just to grasp these truths.

We can't avoid what Jesus is saying here through John. Maybe you've been running from these truths for some time. Maybe you've been running away from Jesus.

But you know, time is transient. Time passes by quickly. You know, eternity is eternity. Time is passing by so quickly.

[31 : 19] Where will you be in the eternity beyond time? Will you be with Jesus and his church? Or will you be apart from Jesus and apart from the church?

Don't let this opportunity, another opportunity pass you by. Well, because this is now. You're here for a purpose. This is now. What does God's word tell us? Now is the accepted time.

Now is the day of salvation, the day of repentance. It's not too late on this side of eternity, not too late to give your life to Jesus. And so hear his word and come to him and you will know the blessing of new life in the Lord Jesus.

You'll know that blessing now and you'll know that blessing eternally. Amen. Let us pray. Our loving heavenly Father, you who in your love have given us to see even through the vision that John was given to see this vision of the new heaven and the new earth.

Oh Lord, may it be that these are not simply words that come in one minute and out the next and no further consideration. But may it be that truly we'll be thinking long and hard over these words.

[32 : 39] That you'll give us to meditate upon your word of truth and that we will live in the light of eternity. That we will live with that prospect of Jesus' return and therefore seek to follow you, to live for you, to do your will, to delight in your mercy and your grace.

Lord, if there's anyone here this evening who as yet has not given his or her life to you by faith in the Lord Jesus, oh Lord, quicken their souls. Oh Lord, draw them to yourself.

May they so know that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus died for them in Calvary. May they submit themselves, give themselves to you and know that peace everlasting.

Hear us Lord as we continue to wait upon you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now we're going to close the service in the same psalm we were singing a wee while ago.

Psalm 45a. We're going to sing from verse 6 to 11 and again remember what we're singing is singing of both of Jesus and his church just as we were thinking of the church as the bride of Christ.

[33 : 57] I mean verse 6 talks about your royal throne, oh God will last through eternity. That's plain enough. But then we come to verse 9. Among the women of your court, king's daughters take their standard, royal bride and fine as gold appears at your right hand.

Again, these words were written many, many hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus came.

These are words that tell of the church as the royal bride and we sing therefore with faith and understanding and joy.

Psalm 45a from verse 6 to the end of the psalm to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen.