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Preacher: Joshua Gigliotti

[0 : 00] Good morning. If you would turn to Revelation chapter 21, please.! An example for us to follow in his footsteps after he's ascended to the Father.

Revelation 21, I will read starting in verse 2. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men. And he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them.

And he will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death, nor will there be any more mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things have passed away. And he who sits on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

So why this text? Well, if you're anything like me, or like the millions of children around the globe, you have now entered your annual seasonal depression.

[1 : 37] This is not necessarily from snow, especially in New England this year, nor is it from the shorter days, but something far more poignant than this. The cause of this depression finds its source in one single day.

December 26th, the day after Christmas. What a terrible day. This one day causes such mourning across the nations. But why? Why does the collective sigh of humanity rise on that morning of, that was it?

It's over? Just like that? It's because we joined collectively with children from 1 to 92 in waiting and hoping for this one day called Christmas.

And the anticipation was building. The hope was rising. This crescendo was building for Christmas to come. Each day that we crossed off our Advent calendar, Christmas was one day closer.

And no matter how good the cookie trays were on Christmas, or how great the family laughter, or how great your gifts were, somehow Christmas Day never quite fills the void long enough to last into Christmas morning, or the 26th morning.

[2 : 54] It was hope that got us to that point, right? It was hope that got our cadets through their final weeks of school. It was hope that got some of our grad students through their exams.

It was hope that got us through those final weeks of teaching, for those of you who are teachers. It was hope that when your kids were sick, at least Dad will be home for vacation to take care of them with me, right?

There was this hope that we kept holding on to. And the hope was that Christmas was coming. But it came. And it went. And so the question that we ask now is, what is the hope of the Christian?

Was it just for Christmas morning, that day called it's December 25th in our calendar? Or is it something a little bit more profound that we are supposed to cling to? See, for thousands of years, and this is kind of what our Advent series talked about, the hope of Christians was that the long-awaited Messiah would come to earth, would set things right, vindicate a people of Israel, and establish God's good kingdom on earth.

But what hope is there now for the Christian when it seems that this baby Jesus came and may not have accomplished all these goals? And so the question that we ask is, does the church mirror culture in our December 26th depression?

[4 : 17] The answer is a resounding no. And we will unpack this by asking two further questions. Number one, what is the hope of the Christian?

And number two, how does this knowledge influence the way we live now? So what is the hope of the Christian? And how does that influence how we are to live in the here and now?

Let us pray. Let us pray. Father, we joined in the groaning and the longing for you to send your son to earth.

Father, we look at the world and we see brokenness and we see pain. And for thousands of years, humanity has seen brokenness and pain. And we look to you as our hope. And Father, you have come.

You have sent your son. And Lord, our desire is now to live in a way that responds to what you have done. Father, we are to be the most hopeful of all people.

[5 : 26] And I ask that through your word here, that we would feel all the more hopeful for what you are doing and how we are to participate in what you are doing. God, you are a good father to us and a good God to us.

And we ask for you to bless us with knowledge from your scripture so that we can return blessing to you and be a blessing to the nations. It's in the name of Jesus, our Messiah, that I ask these things. Amen. Okay, so Revelation 21. Why this text? This text is the most hopeful of all texts to me. What do we see in this final scene of scripture?

As we wait here, as God leaves us a text, after he has come, he leaves us scripture. And the final scene of his text says what?

If I were writing it, I think it would go something like, Jesus comes down from heaven, gathers all of his people into one group.

[6 : 28] This group ascends into the cloud to meet Jesus. And then we escape this broken, terrible, painful earth, leave earth and go to heaven. But if you look at Revelation 21, this final scene of God's text that he left man with, that's not what we see.

Rather, it's precisely the opposite, right? Heaven itself, with Jesus at its center, descending from heaven down to earth. Jesus there as a light and righteousness for the nations.

It is not humanity fleeing this earth, escaping it, leaving something bad, going something good. No, it is heaven coming down, restoring earth. Jesus himself dwelling in the midst of mankind again.

I am convinced that if we let this truth hit our hearts, it will fill us with the most abiding and indelible hope possible. He is coming.

God himself is coming to earth. So, question number one was, what is the hope of the Christian?

One answer is this. The hope of the Christian is that God, as triumphal king, is returning to earth, establishing his kingdom, and is making all things new.

[7 : 47] That is the hope of the Christian. So, in many ways, the rest of this sermon will be unpacking a part of that first point and then there's a second point that we're going to say that, okay, in light of all this, what do we do in response?

So, the hope of the Christian is that God, as triumphal king, is returning to earth, establishing his kingdom, and making all things new. So, why is that hopeful? Well, number one, God is coming back. Think through this.

If the sermon were to end right now, if all of church were to end right now, we never heard another text from scripture, God is coming back. What a different God we have compared to all the other so-called gods of the nations.

I look at the world and I see pain and I see brokenness and I see turmoil. I see strife. But this is not the end. God has not thrown his hands up on this project that he calls human existence on earth, scrapping the whole thing, saying, enough with it, I'm done.

It's not what we see. We see God coming back. He has promised to do it and he will do it. And so, number one, we have hope because God is coming back. This text from Revelation, he descends from heaven to dwell once again among man.

[9 : 01] This should fill us with hope. But the hope of the Christian is not just that Jesus is coming back, but that he is coming back as triumphal and reigning king.

Why does this fill us with hope? First, what is kingdom? I fear that we may confuse this term kingdom, especially when we read it in scripture. Yes, kingdom at times may mean a geographic location.

The United Kingdom, for example. This is a set space of kingdom. kingdom. But in scripture, especially in the New Testament, this is not exactly how the term kingdom is used.

When Jesus tells us in Mark 1.15, for example, that the kingdom is at hand, he's not saying that the actual tectonic plates of this place called heaven is now crashing in to this tectonic plate called earth and these two new geographic spaces will become one.

It's not quite what he's saying. Rather, something more profound. kingdom here is not the place of ruling but a way of ruling. And so when God says that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, the time is

fulfilled, he is unveiling a radically new way of being human.

[10:20] Did his kingdom come? Yes, it did. And this is why I'm very excited for this parable series because we can go far more in depth on this than we can do right now. Did his kingdom come?

Yes, it came. Was it a country? No. No. Is there a flag that's now raised over some nation in Israel or in the Middle East that says this is God's not precisely. But he's given us a way of living in the present in light of the future.

And so in that way, yes, his kingdom has come. The second hope of the Christian is that Jesus is coming back as triumphal, reigning, and ruling king.

there will once again, we see in the New Testament that there is this triumphal entry. When Jesus comes back into Jerusalem, there are a host of people who go to meet him as he comes to the city, lay down palm branches before him, and yell, Hosanna to the highest, here comes the God of all salvation.

We will see this again. The third point. The hope of the Christian is that Jesus is coming to put all things back to right again.

[11:39] Psalm 96. You don't have to turn that. I'm going to read two passages from Psalm 96 and one from Psalm 98. Psalm 96.

Hear this word from Psalms. Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. Indeed, the world is firmly established.

It will not be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar and all it contains. Let the field exult and all that is in it.

All the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the earth and the peoples in faithfulness.

The same theme two chapters later. Psalm 98. Shout joyfully to the Lord all the earth. Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.

[12:40] Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre. Sing with the lyre or with the lyre in the sound of melody with trumpets and the sound of the horn. Shout joyfully to the king. Hear this. Let the sea roar and all it contains. Let the world and those who dwell in it.

Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing together for joy before the Lord for he is coming. He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Hope number three. The Christian hopes that Jesus is coming back to put all things back to right again. Why are the rivers clapping? Why are mountains joining in song when a judge is coming? Because this judge is putting things back to right again. If any of you have ever been in court or had a friend in court and were innocent, you long for a righteous judgment. This is reason for rejoicing and so it seems strange to us so I think we think judge means punishment or judge means something bad is about to happen.

This is not how God portrays himself nor his judgment in scripture. He says, when I come back to judge, all of creation will be undone from its curse. The rivers will clap, mountains sing.

[13:53] All of humanity will join in this song of rejoicing and thanksgiving to God because he is coming to judge and he's a righteous judge. So there is hope here.

There is also this theme that we see in scripture of God being a gardener and a cultivator. If you have a zoomed out version or a view perhaps of scripture, you will see that this theme of a garden is both in Genesis and is carried through all the way through Revelation.

In Genesis 1 we see God creating a garden and calling it good, establishing fruit, establishing man in that garden for the benefit of man, for his glory. In Genesis 3 we see that man actually sinned and so it is cursed.

There are now thorn bushes, there is now toiling to be done. But what do we see in Revelation 22? Revelation 22. Again, this idea of a garden.

Genesis. God walks among man in his garden as man dwells with God. Revelation 22. Again, this final scene that God leaves us with. 22, verse 1, 2.

[15:11] 2.

Here, again, this garden with fruit. The fruit is for what? The blessing of the nations. And who is there? God is again dwelling among the midst of man. And so this theme of God as a gardener, as one who is cultivating things, not giving up on them, but is actually undoing this curse.

Isaiah 55 talks about how where there once was the thorn bush, there is now the myrtle tree. Where there was once the prickly, there is now the cedar tree. It talks about God caring about a garden,

actually not giving up on it, saying it's too cursed.

No. What we see in God is a God who cares about restoration, who cares about putting things back to right again. And so the question is, is this now or is this sometime in the future?

That's a fair question. The church is somewhat divided at times of in what sense the kingdom is here, but I think for today, let us think this way, that Jesus has initiated his kingdom on earth.

[16:40] Does this mean it's fulfilled? No, not at all. But what God has started, humanity is tasked with continuing until he comes again. Remember, a kingdom is not a place of ruling, it's a way of ruling.

And so as we see God coming to put things back to right again, so too we have a response to follow in the same footsteps. We see in the rest of scripture as this theme is kind of elaborated, that God is one who doesn't give up, that God puts things back to right.

We don't turn there, but Isaiah 60, it talks about the branch of his planting, God alone, God himself will plant this branch, will see it to bring fruit to the nations. Ezekiel 17, 22 talks about how God is like an eagle who goes to the highest of cedars, plucks a branch from the top of it, brings it to this other mountain, plants it, and then creates in it a strong cedar tree, one that is his nation for the blessing of the nation.

So we see this idea that God is one who cares, who cultivates, who doesn't give up, but who restores things. Even this idea in Revelation 21 that we read first, he who sits on the throne, the throne, the king, says this, behold, I am making all things new.

What a hope! I love passages of scripture like this, like this, or like Isaiah 11 where it says the lion and the lamb will lay together, where a little boy will put his hand in the hole that it's a viper or a snake.

[18:21] There's this absolutely, we look at this and say that's not the way the world is now. But what is our hope? What is our future hope? that God is coming to put things back to right again. And I think in spite of all of the, in light of rather, all of the potentially depressing post-Christmas blues that we have, or just this whole idea that the days are short and winter and things are kind of tough, we need to hold on to hope.

I love holding on to this type of hope. When God is coming to put things back. Isaiah, don't turn there, I'm going to read one more passage. I love this.

Hear this word of encouragement from God. This is talking about the new heaven and the new earth, that he will create, verse 18 says, for the people's gladness. Verse 24, it will come to pass that before they call, I will answer.

And while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food.

They will do no evil or harm all of my holy mountain. What a hope to hold on to. I look at the world, and nowhere at any point, for any reason, do I ever see a lion and a lamb, or a wolf and a lamb, grazing together.

[19:36] That's not the way the world is right now. But I love, as the Christian, that I say, my God is one who is coming back, and this will be a reality soon. I need to hold this hope.

And I'm convinced that if Jesus, if the hold on to grasp to cling to these hopes as well, I can't wait, in whatever this actually means, to see rivers clapping, to see the mountains bowing down and singing, because God has come and made things right again.

And so the fourth point here, number one was God is coming, or sorry, the hope is that Christ is coming back. Number two is that he is coming back, not just coming back, but coming back as a triumphal king.

Number three is that he is coming to put things back to right again. And number four, hope of the Christian is that he is bringing healing to the nations. Let us not forget, in midst of this Narnia-type sounding river clapping, that God is in the business of saving souls.

He is concerned for humanity and creation, but this temple, this tabernacle that we saw in Revelation 21 coming down from heaven to earth, we just learned how this tabernacle, how this temple is being built in Ephesians, didn't we?

[20:57] In Ephesians, it talks about how being built on the foundation of Jesus and the prophets and the apostles, those who come to put their faith in Jesus are the building blocks of this temple.

And so the hope of the Christian is that Jesus is building this temple, that he is healing the nations, bringing his message to the nations. God is the God of unity.

Jews and Gentiles now reconciled. Those who were once far off are now brought near by the blood of Jesus. All ethnic groups, Revelation 7, 9 replays this second version of the triumphal entry. And I love this because this gives me hope as well, that it's not just us, it's not just our church, this isn't it. God is in the process of healing nations, and what that means too is bringing spiritual restoration.

Revelation 7, 9 I looked and behold a great multitude which none could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes and palm branches were in their hands and their cry was salvation to our God who sits in the throne and to the Lamb.

[22 : 11] This same triumphal entry, this same idea of all the nations bowing before God, this is happening because God is restoring the nations and so this gives the Christian hope. So what do we do?

If this is what God is doing, how then are we to live now? A former college professor of mine Dr. Gombe, some of you may know him, gave me what I think is the best advice for Christian living and for how to look at Scripture in the New Testament especially.

He sees the New Testament as a drama. He sees this whole thing as a drama unfolding throughout the earth and so in Scripture we see actors on this stage, we see people, we see actors living true to their roles but also we see how we are given a script for how to live and what I think is if we are looking at what God is doing in the future and what he's doing now, this is giving us a script for how to live in the here and now.

We are not to be those who flee into some secluded monastery just concerned with offering up gifts of worship to Jesus although that's important to do. That's not what we see.

[23 : 35] we see Jesus coming to earth, we see disciples being sent throughout the earth to promote God's kingdom and so how do we do that? What does it look like to be people of hope?

Because the final scene, here's the question, because the final scene in scripture is heaven coming to earth, earth receiving heaven and Jesus, we are to be people who hold hope ever before our eyes.

It is no secret if you know me that I love C.S. Lewis and most of his writing, particularly the Chronicles of Narnia. I was a little bit embarrassed when I started tearing up in some of my times of reading.

It's just a wonderful climactic book. People say it's a children's book that is an absolute heresy. I love Narnia. And I am convinced that C.S.

Lewis was spot on with his description of our current existence. For those of you who are not familiar with Narnia, although I hope all of you are, if you're not, we may be having a book stall come up soon and I will be sure to have Narnia stocked in the shelves.

[24 : 51] Narnia in the first book, The Lion Witch and the Wardrobe, it is this land of Narnia, and it is a land that is ruled by an evil queen. And one of the ways that she rules or she demonstrates her power over Narnia is by keeping it forever winter.

There's a line that's repeated in Narnia that says, always winter, never Christmas. Dreadful. There's no hope. We've kind of gone through this already. Always winter, never Christmas.

But what you see brooding in the Lion Witch and the Wardrobe is the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, as he calls them, enter this land of Narnia.

And they hear rumors. There's a rumor that Aslan is on the move. They don't quite know what this means yet. Lewis brilliantly describes God as this lion named Aslan.

And in the midst of this frozen, ice-covered land called Narnia, these rumors of Aslan is on the move is spreading. And so in the midst of the darkest nights of Narnia, suddenly, all of creation, both beavers and trees and nymphs and all these other made-up things that Lewis wrote in his book, they notice something.

[26 : 10] And for the first time, they look and they see ice melting, dripping from the tree branches. They see the rivers starting to break a little bit and trickling down the rocks they once flowed down.

They see the snow becoming slushy. And this fills them with such hope. And I am convinced that Lewis is spot on. Do we see this kingdom fully restored right away?

No. We see a progression. We see Aslan on the move. And what that means is he is bringing this restoration back. For us, as people who know God's final scene of coming back to earth, of putting things back to right again, we are to be people of such hope.

We are to look around and see how this ice of our current Narnia is melting. And we are to join in in this work. Number two of how we are then to live.

We are to be people filled with most hope. Number two, we are to be no longer enslaved to the powers that rule in this current culture. As we read through Paul, and we will not go through all of the prison epistles today.

[27 : 24] But what you see in Paul, especially as he writes through these prison epistles, is that God is a cosmically triumphal king. And what that means is that he has triumphed over all things, death, but also these things called the powers and authorities, or what I think is the way that we are compelled to live by being under the curse.

Colossians is a beautiful song of Jesus' triumph over these powers and authorities. But what does this mean for us? How does that change how we live? We're no longer slaves to the way of the world.

This is practical. When Hannah and I, when my wife and I are getting in an argument, or she says something that frustrates me, I, because of Jesus' triumph, I no longer have to respond in one-upping that, or lording dominance over the argument, or being proven to it.

Why? Because Jesus has won my triumph, and I do not need to win my triumph in my argument. Right? When coworkers make us angry, or expect us to respond in a certain way to something they've done, we are freed from that.

We've been set free from that bondage. Why? Because our identity is no longer in how my coworkers view me, or how my boss wants me to respond to a bad situation.

[28 : 41] No. My identity is now in Jesus. I have been freed from those things. Why? Because Jesus has triumphed over the powers. I love this song of Ephesians and Colossians as he ascended and triumphs over all of these.

Meaning that if we are in Jesus, we have victory in Jesus. And that if we have victory in Jesus, we are no longer slaves to this. We, like creation, in Romans 8, are still under this sense of bondage, that things are not perfectly set right again.

But also, like creation, we join in groaning and longing for God to free us fully from this bondage.

But in the day-to-day living, you and I are no longer slaves to the way of culture, to the way of our empire, so to speak, as I think Paul would have phrased it, of America.

Finally, we care because of what the future has. We care about renewal and restoration and redemption. If we see God as one who renews and restores and redeems, then we, too, are to be people who work for renewal, restoration, and redemption.

If the final scene is heaven coming to earth, not humanity and disembodied souls fleeing earth going to heaven, this changes how we live.

[30 : 05] I think about an example in my own life. Most of you know, Hannah and I rent our home in East Lime, and there's the option that we may stay there. Our landlord has offered graciously to sell it to us where we pay her lots of money, but there's the option that we may stay in this home for the long term.

And so we're very strange renters, I think, because when things happen in our house, for example, our shower door was leaking upstairs, and so on the downstairs we saw a stain on the ceiling. And I think if we were typical renters, I think if we were people, Christians, who said, ah, we're out of this earth soon, going to heaven, don't need to care about it, we wouldn't have done anything. That's not the way we respond.

We saw a stain coming on the ceiling, and we said, no, this is our home. We're not just counting on the days until we leave this rental agreement, but we're going to live as though we are coming and restoring and making this place new again.

And so we care about these types of things. We call our landlord, we go through the hassle of having subcontractors come in, and I don't know why it was such a long process to put a shower door in, but Hannah, what was it, three or four weeks of contractors coming to our house for one door?

[31 : 15] I'm not quite sure of that one yet, but we do it because we care about the restoration of this house. And I think this is the same kind of mindset that we should have as Christians.

We're not just, if we see stains on this earth, if we see bad things happening, we don't just throw our hands up and say, only a little bit longer until I'll fly away, oh glory, I'll fly away.

That's not how it goes. Rather, we should say, how can I join in on God's renewal here? What does it look like for us to be people of restoration? If God's kingdom has been initiated and he has shown us the way of ruling, our day-to-day living changes.

And so why enter the foster care system? Because we have a heart that's now compelled to renew and restore relationships, right? Why do we spend energy on coworkers talking about how glorious our Jesus is?

If it's just a, we're in the church, we're good, we're safe, we're leaving soon, then we don't invest in that, do we? Rather, if we look at who God is and what he is doing, we spend the time going into our coworkers, we spend time with them, sharing the love of Jesus with them because we care for them, because God is one of restoration and redemption.

[32 : 34] Why do we join in the healing of neighborhoods? Why are we talking about how to bless this neighborhood in New London? Because we see a God who is a God who restores. We see a God of renewal.

And so as we join in his work, this is what our lives now look like. In conclusion, in this first sermon of a new year, I hope that your souls can leave brimming with hope for what God is doing now, for what God is going to do, and for how my life in the present can be guided by God's future.

None of us know how long this wait will be. I pray that we don't meet next Sunday, that the Lord will have come back, put all things back to ready. I would love that.

But none of us know. And so as we wait, remember that Aslan is on the move. Look around. The snow is melting. As we continue to live as God's kingdom people, we mark off days on our own Advent number two type calendar waiting for the final coming of this Lamb who is victorious.

And as we dwell on this Lamb and the life he lived and all of the paradoxes of first being last, victory in losing life and death that we'll go through in the parable series, as we dwell on these things, let us embody these kingdom type ways of living to work to prepare the earth for the receipt of heaven.

[34 : 14] Let us pray. Father God, we look with such hope towards your final scene.

God, to see heaven itself coming to earth, to see God once again dwelling among man, where we see his face just like the first time in the garden, where we lay palm branches down, just like the first triumphal entry.

God, when you reverse this curse that earth has been under, putting things back to new, back to right again, God, we hold this hope dearly in our hearts.

And Lord, it would delight us if we did not see each other again face to face until you come. And so in that we pray that you would come, Lord. You say that you are making all things new, you say that you are coming quickly, and we, in whatever way possible, beckon you to do those things.

God, as we wait, and as we watch ISIS savagely kill people, as we watch girls be kidnapped in Africa, as we watch America take on this anti-God mentality, we are people who need hope and who find our hope.

[35 : 37] And Lord, my prayer to you is that you will fill our souls with a greater measure of hope from what you are doing and what you are about to do. You are a good God and a good Father.

In the name of Jesus, our Messiah, I ask these things. Amen.