

Revelation 21:1-8, 22:1-5 PM

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Date: 02 March 2025

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[0 : 0 0] You pray for us. Heavenly Father, would you open up our hearts so that we can hear your word this evening. In Christ's name, amen. Please be seated.

If you haven't met me, my name's Aaron. Come and say hi to me afterwards. So we are at the end of our Story of God series. And our final passage is one of the final passages in the whole Bible. And it's about our final destiny with God. And let me just say something you probably already know. The book of Revelation that John read so well to us this evening is a particular type of genre. It's called apocalyptic writing. It's not a genre we see much of nowadays.

It's very dramatic. It's full of symbols. But it would be a mistake to think of it as like a code that we have to try and decipher.

The writer here is not using symbols to try and hide something from us. To try and hide something from us. Like some grand mystery that only very clever people will understand one day.

It's just that the writer is trying to communicate something so beautiful and so wonderful that it's like he doesn't have the words. It's like trying to explain to a baby in the womb like the beauty of a sunset.

[1 : 4 4] So we get these pictures. We get these images of things we do know about. Precious metals, jewels and stuff. To help explain some things that we it's just really hard to wrap our head around.

So it's a bit of an intro. Let's get into some detail. Okay so we are looking at Revelation 21 verse 1 to chapter 22 verse 5. And you can see it's all about the hope of heaven. And it really is lots of ways you could break this up.

And I cannot talk about every single thing in this. But I'm going to put I'm going to try and talk about the big things under three categories. The place, the people and the presence.

Place, people, presence. Let's start off by talking about the place of heaven. I have a number of things to say about this. First verse 5. God says, Behold I'm making all things new.

That's really important. Do you notice it doesn't say I'm making all new things. It says I'm making all things new.

[2 : 4 8] So there will be continuity between this life and the next life. Heaven will be recognisable. This is a bit of a lowbrow kind of example. But I see you'd notice that Super Mario Brothers movie just dropped on Netflix.

Right? There you go. And you know how they go to different lands like Candyland and all these kind of absurd kind of places that are just completely bonkers. Right? That's not like what heaven will be like.

It'll be recognisable to us. The word new in verse 5 means new in quality not time.

So heaven might be this totally different cosmos but a renewed one. There'll be continuity from old life to new life. Second we're still talking about place here.

Heaven is stuff. It's made of stuff. You writing that one down Jacob? That's good. Heaven is stuff.

[3 : 55] I know what you're thinking. Did you have a rough week Aaron? Is that the best you could come up with? Don't you have an expensive theological degree?

This is actually an important point. Heaven is stuff. There's roads. There's trees. There's people. There's gates. It seems silly to point this out but there's this cliché idea of heaven of spirit people and robes and clouds and stuff but heaven will be physical.

We will be physical beings. The hope of heaven is not that we're sort of divested of our bodies and we live these genderless sort of culturalist spirituality kind of lives.

We will be redeemed spiritually and physically living in a real remade earth. The whole you know cloudy thing that's that's uncreation.

It's not recreation. It's uncreation. It's the opposite of what revelation is saying. Heaven is stuff. It's solid. It's solid. It's solid. It's not ethereal.

[5 : 02] It's not wishy-washy. It's real hope. It's something real. So at that point let's dive into some of the physical descriptions and try and wrap our heads around just a few of them here. For example what do we do with gold streets in verse 12?

For example. Gold streets. Streets made of gold. Is that just saying it's going to be fancy? Is it just saying it's going to be like a gated community for the super rich?

So it's just got the fanciest stuff. I don't think that's the idea. It's more like this. Gold, as you know, is highly prized. Highly prized in the world today.

Throughout history. There was a point in history, I think it was until up until the 1930s that the whole monetary system of the planet was built around the value of gold. People still kill for gold.

But in heaven the most highly prized thing now in heaven it's just something we walk on. That's how amazing it's going to be.

[6 : 15] Again, there's symbols here. I don't know if it's actually going to be gold. But the writer is trying to communicate something that when we get there we won't be disappointed.

The same idea I think is all the multicolored jewels everywhere. Now there's a bit of an argument that some scholars make that there was a high priest way back in the days who would wear this breastplate with 12 jewels on it representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

Perhaps there's a nod to that. We don't really know. Lots of theories. But I think the plainest meaning of the text is the city will be flooded with beauty. Flooded with beauty.

And do you notice where they put the jewels? If you look closely where do they put the jewels? The jewels are on the foundations. So the part of the city you don't normally see the part that's kind of ugly like in our life it's ugly it's inconspicuous it's like hidden it's like made out of concrete and rebar and stuff.

That's going to be that part is going to be ridiculously gorgeous. Even that part. Remember again symbols? I don't know if it's literal I don't know. But you see if you slide your eyes over the passage you do see the word like repeated John says it's like this and it's going to be like this and it's like it's made out of this and it's like made out of this John is he's mining his imagination for the most beautiful things he can think of to try and convey what heaven will be like.

[7 : 47] Okay what else physically? Well it's a city with a river running through it and some trees verse 22 and the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nation so what did we learn there?

Wow there's so much to unpack there I just want to say one thing it's interesting isn't it that the Bible starts it starts with the garden and it ends with the city so heaven is not a return to Eden so Joni Mitchell she died recently didn't she?

just a little while ago Canadian songwriter and she sung that song Woodstock that you might remember it was the song it's kind of like a lament and at the end of the chorus she says we've got to get back to the garden which is a lovely sentiment but the end game biblically is not a garden it's a city well it sounds like a garden as well but like it's a city so it's something more and better than Eden and why a city?

what's so great about a city? well I think as you can sort of muse around this a little bit here in a city we're dependent on each other a city works because everyone plays a part to make it work so it's not like the sort of you know Henry Thoreau idea of kind of like paradise being you know we're in a cabin by ourselves and we're totally self-sufficient living off the land you know it's lovely but it's but God's plan for us is a city one guy I read this week talked about it like this he said heaven will be like if it's like an orchestra playing it's not a solo it's a symphony we all play a part that's why it ends in a city there will be dependence on each other not self-reliance okay what else about these physical descriptions well there's a great big wall verse 17 walls in the ancient times marked out a city and more importantly they protect it so it's a beautiful wall it's made out of jasper it's ridiculously tall verse 27 says nothing bad can pass through this wall so it's trying to communicate the city which is absolutely gorgeous it's completely secure okay that's the place heaven beautiful tangible safe let's talk about presence next god promises us his immediate presence how does the passage tell us well interestingly one of the ways it tells us is through dimensions remember the part john read for us where he says like there's an angel and he's got a measuring stick and he starts to measure out the place and we find out that it's like 12,000 stadia which is a couple of thousand k and what do we make of that is it just saying there's lots of room like it's roomy well the key is actually verse 16 it says the length and width and height are equal what does that tell us it's a cube why is that important there's only one other cube in the bible and where's that in the old testament right in the center of the tabernacle which is like the big church back in the day at the center of the tabernacle was a room called the holy of holies and it was a cube it's the only other cube in the bible and it's where god's glory dwelt his raw presence and the only person that could go into that room back in the days was the high priest supposedly the holiest person like around in israel and he would enter that room once a year on the day of atonement which is a big festival and after days and days of purifying himself through lots of rituals and he'd go back there and on his robe he'd have to wear like little bells on the bottom of his robe so they could hear him to make sure he's still moving around that he hadn't died in there and had a rope tied around one of his legs in case he did die they could drag him out again serious business the holy of holies so heaven the new jerusalem is described as a cube referencing that holy of holies it's saying that this place will contain the raw pure undiluted presence of god so it's not like in heaven there'll be a special place where god is hanging out like on a hill and we get to look up and you know catch a glance every now and then but god's presence god will be present to every part of it god will touch every part of heaven and this is the most wonderful thing about it

heaven will be unimaginably beautiful mostly because god will be there and his presence will be immediate to us passage says we won't need the sun or the moon to shine on us because it'll be like he will light the place up and the idea is emphasized in verse 22 when it says there will be no temple no tabernacle in heaven and the jewish readers at the time were reading that they'll be freaking out because it's like this was the temple was the center of jewish life it's where you sort of mediated and facilitated access to god so in israel you had this big temple you had outer courts you had inner courts you had inner sanctum and to move from outer court to the next one to the next court you had to go through all these required levels of holiness and purification and ceremonies and stuff and like I said before there was the room right at the center of this cube only accessible by one guy once a year and the new jewish have no temple because there's nothing to mediate a relationship with god we were there with god with christ nothing will separate us from god verse 4 says we will see his face we will look into god's eyes and we will experience nothing but love imagine that we won't be embarrassed we won't be afraid we won't be shamed when you could live the most amazing life you could have everything and you wouldn't be satisfied because at our core we were made to be in the presence of god we were created to be in relationship with god and this this is kind of like the greatest thing about heaven isn't it there'll be nothing between us and god we will see the face of god as i describe this to you you might be thinking you might be thinking well i can't go because i'll ruin it like we'll just ruin it i'll mess it up how will it stay really great right if jacob's there or you're there with your anger and your whatever selfishness or whatever else you've got going on i once amy and i and the kids went with extended family on a vacation a few years ago somebody lent us their vacation home in north carolina and it was a lovely home and we walked into this house it was incredible it was right on the beach it was perfect everything high end very well appointed we looked down the carpet pure white carpet throughout and for one second we thought this is incredible and then the very next second we thought we're going to destroy it we're going to destroy this house white carpet and a beach house so let's talk about people how do we know we're not going to ruin it so we're talking about place presence now people place real beautiful safe presence we're going to be with god now the people because i think this is the bit that kind of can trip us up there's a lovely picture in verse two you know throughout the bible the church the people are called the bride the bride of christ right and it says in verse two that the bride will be adorned you know i've done a few weddings i think i've actually done a few of your weddings and um the bride always looks fantastic on the wedding day always looks incredible that idea

[17 : 00] when it says we're going to be a bride adorned for a husband it means that we will be made fit to be in god's presence god will do something so that we are fit to be in his presence so we won't mess it up what else does the passage tell us about people in heaven well when trying to describe something indescribable sometimes what the bible does is it uses a strategy called via negativa do you know that phrase via negativa why don't you explain it to them it's a very confident nod so it's just it's a latin phrase it just means before telling you what something is let's tell you what it isn't as a helpful way of telling you what it is does that make sense let's tell you what something isn't as a way of getting to what it is so for example in verse 1 it says there'll be no sea s-e-a there'll be no sea in verse 1 which is a shock shock for me bit of a shock for you but again remember symbolic does it mean there will literally be no sea i don't know i don't know but what the sea represents won't be there so what does the sea represent in the ancient near east the sea represented a number of things the sea was a dangerous and unpredictable thing and even more importantly it was the great separator of people remember if you've read a bit of the bible if you've read a bit of the new testament you know that Paul goes on these journeys where he has to jump on these boats and travel around he's at least shipwrecked at least four times so the sea represents this thing that's dangerous and it separates people so when the bible says no sea one of the things it's trying to communicate is that there'll be no barriers in human relationships there'll be nothing to separate you from other people verse four says there'll be no tears no death no sorrow no pain and it's good to have a cry

I know sometimes and pain makes us stronger I know these things but remember if you think via negativa it's trying to say this place will be a place of joy and vibrancy and it'll be eternal and verse eight says there'll be no cowardly faithless or detestable people there it'll be a place free from sin from selfishness and from separation and there's so much more to say but I'm going to finish up so heaven is solid it's social and we will dwell there with God unashamed it's it's almost too good to be believable isn't it which I think explains why verse five is there verse five says and he was seated on the throne and said and he who says talking about God here says behold

I am making all things new and then he says write this down because it's so unbelievable God says write that down but these words are trustworthy and true so we can trust this will happen because God has promised it but how does it help us now how does this specific promise of God help us now you know the book was originally written to folks the first readers were people under tremendous persecution persecution of the kind that we'll never kind of have to face likely but the historical evidence says that many many Christians went to the death praising God though some did give up their faith as we are tempted to sometimes there's an interesting set of sins in verse eight isn't there as for the cowardly the faithfulness the detestable murderers sexually immoral sorcerers idolaters and liars their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire feels like a random list doesn't it the scholarship on this says that these were the sins connected to emperor worship one of the things that the emperor mandated was that you worship him as a god and these were sins connected to that people of faith giving up on their faith we are tempted by the gods of our age to pull back

I think I remember being a student at Regent I was in my later thirties my peers in the old country were professionals living large doing well I had this to get me through Regent I think I had three part time jobs one of them was cleaning student housing for like ten dollars an hour and student housing is filthy and I remember walking to work one day earning this poultry salary so poor and just walking from Regent over to UBC and this kid who would have been 18 just drove past me slowly in a supercar and I got so angry and I thought what am I doing like I'm all in for Jesus but I'm starting to feel like I'm getting ripped off here because it was hard it was hard Revelation 21 22 is for us it is a call to perseverance it is a call to faithfulness in

Christ it is a call to fortitude because of what's ahead of us but do you notice it doesn't just say well come on dig in stay strong go for gold have at it it doesn't say that's not the strategy the writer the vision that the writer was given it captures our hearts with the beauty of what Christ has for us that's its strategy it captures our hearts with the beauty of what Christ has for us and that should motivate us and that should focus our mind remember J.R.

[23 : 44] Packer speaking about this passage and at the end he said well what are we to do with these thoughts and he said we think them which is great isn't that a great line what do we do with these thoughts he says we think them we consider them we let the beauty of what God has for us we let it shape our allegiances we let it shape our commitments and we let the values of this future home invade our present behaviour that's what we do Amen