

Revelation 21:1-8, 22:1-5 Early Morning

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray as we stand. Father, blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Amen. Please have a seat. My name is Ryan Spear and I have the privilege of serving as a curate here at St. John's, which is kind of a pastoral apprentice. I get to do things like helping out with youth ministry and things like preaching today.

Well, it's my pleasure to turn with you to the book of the Revelation of Jesus. It concludes not just our Bible, but our Story of God series, what we've been going through for the past nine weeks.

And as I reflected on this passage this morning in the time that we have, one word came to mind. Fulfillment. That was a very appropriate word, in part because this passage fulfills our Story of God series.

But as you work through this passage, you'll notice that it touches on our deepest desires. We often look fulfillment in the things of this world.

[1 : 1 0] I did just a little bit of research in preparation on what our world thinks fulfillment is. I noticed there's just a few interesting things. First of all, fulfillment tended to look backwards.

It tended to look at the life you've lived before to try to justify how you feel right now. And secondly, it seemed to be rather self-authored.

One commentator on the well-established website Reddit said that fulfillment is what you need it to be, nothing else. Only you can decide what fulfills you.

I thought that was pretty interesting and pretty sad. But our passage today helps us understand fulfillment in two primary ways. The first way is what fulfillment looks like.

The second is where fulfillment comes from. The big idea is this. It's that this fulfillment touches on our deepest longings.

[2 : 0 9] And our prayer will be, as one commentator said about this passage, to see ourselves according to the destiny to which God has created us. For see ourselves according to the destiny to which God has created us.

And then to act accordingly. But before we dive into this, we need a little bit of context. So we're going to look at fulfillment in Revelation. And I want to close with this reflection on how this passage concludes our series in the story of God.

And how it might equip us to both see ourselves in the story. And communicate this story to others. But some context here. So this is Revelation in 30 seconds. First, it begins with letters to seven real churches in Asia Minor.

Modern day Turkey primarily. And then there are symbolic visions of judgment. And it concludes with a vision of the end of all things. Which is where our passage is.

Now this is really important. Revelation is not a cryptic code to decipher. John didn't write this in order to confuse people. It's actually a highly symbolic language that points to truer truths.

[3 : 18] The kind of things that are really real. It's part of a genre that was well known at that time. And as people heard it and understood it, they'd say, yes, I kind of know what's going on here. We all know how genre works, right?

You pick up a certain kind of book and you know this is what I can expect out of it. Whether it's a thriller. Whether it's a fantasy. Whatever it might be. Also really important about Revelation. It is drenched with allusions to different parts of scripture.

So the people hearing this would have seen and heard all of these connections. As they heard this read aloud. And its primary purpose was to encourage and to challenge those seven churches.

Because they were under three particular kinds of pressure. First of all, the pressure of persecution. Because Jesus was Lord. It meant that the empire was not.

The pressure of false gospels. Saying you can have Christ. And you can have all the things of this world. Let's mix and mingle them together. And finally, the pressure of cultural compromise.

[4 : 22] You don't even need Christ. Just take what this world has to offer. Those are the themes running through the seven letters to the churches. And the times may have changed.

But the pressures have not. So this is a letter for every generation. Ours included. So let's turn and look at Revelation 21.

Our first section here. And we're going to look first of all at what fulfillment looks like in these first eight verses. So notice first of all, this is primarily a what?

You see a lot of contrasts here. We see that there's a new heaven. A new earth. These are things that are made new. And not new things. But there's no sea. That's our first contrast here.

The sea representing a symbol of chaos. And the forces of evil. Think of the sea that the spirit of God hovered over. The beginning of Genesis. We then see what there is.

[5 : 17] There's a God dwelling with people. And the people dwelling with God. It's repeated in three different ways. But then we see what there's not. No tears.

No death. No mourning. No crying. And our final contrast in this section is that we see satisfaction for our thirst. Coming from the spring of life.

For those who conquer. But we also see what there is not in verse eight. It's a second death. For those whose sins now define all that they are.

So this is a snapshot. A vision of what fulfillment looks like in the new heaven and the new earth. It's a contrast of presence and absence. The presence of newness.

Things that never waste away. That never grow old. Always stay fresh. That new package feel before you open it. It's a fulfillment of belonging.

[6 : 19] Having a place where you are God's and God is yours. No longer jockeying for power and position and wondering who will get more than you.

You have a fullness of belonging. And there's a fullness of satisfaction. This river of life without payment. It's this beautiful image of our thirst that's finally quenched.

So why does this matter? Because we need this vision as a contrast in every age. Just like the original seven churches.

And depending on our setting and where we follow Christ. You might find that one of these three persecutions. Whether it's the pressure when we declare Jesus is Lord. Whether it's false gospels or cultural compromise.

Might be more prominent in your setting or in a season of your life. But we need this image in our mind to serve primarily as a contrast. That there's more than this. There's something ahead.

- [7 : 19] That's our first part of fulfillment. Just having a glimpse. Having a snapshot. Of what awaits. Now part two of our passage turns to the second part of our reading.
- Starting in verse 22 of chapter 21. You'll notice that we're turning from a what fulfillment looks like. To where fulfillment comes from.
- Now the verses we didn't cover. They just talk about Jerusalem and the perfect dimensions. All these numbers and descriptions are meant to convey this powerful emotional response.
- That shows that this place is solid. This place is valuable. This place is perfect and complete. And notice in verse 22. John points out and says.
- But I don't see a temple. That's interesting isn't it? There's no temple. Because the whole thing is a temple. We have more contrast here. You might call this whole section.
- [8 : 16] The light and the lamb. Four times lamb is repeated. All throughout the contrast in images. Is talk about how things are shimmering. And there's no night.
- And the light is coming from the lamb. So notice these contrasts here. Present. Light and glory from God. And the nations. Absence. No night. Nothing unclean.
- No undetestable. Presence. River of life. Tree of life. Healing. Absent. Nothing accursed. No night. Again. All of this points to one central thing.
- The source of fulfillment. Is the presence of God. It's the light. It's the river. It's the tree. I want to dwell briefly.
- On one image here in verse 4. It reads. They will see his face. And their name. Will be. And his name will be.
- [9 : 17] On their foreheads. What this tells us. Is that we'll finally. See Jesus. And see him face to face.
- You heard in our Exodus reading. That Moses. Needed to wear a veil. Over his face. To try to contain. The glory that shone forth. Because it would have been too intense.
- For the people to see. But no longer. Do we need that veil. We'll finally be capable. Of seeing God. In his fullness. In his fullness. And we won't be destroyed.
- That's why it would destroy us. Because it's so good. We will be incapable. Of fully comprehending. And taking it all in.
- But not here. Here we see God. Face to face. But notice. What that means is. We see God. Seeing us. Not just at a distance.
- [10 : 14] Not just in a crowd. But looking at you. Eye to eye. Face to face. That's where fulfillment. Fulfillment. Comes from. So with those two visions.
- In mind. Of what fulfillment. Looks like. And where it comes from. I want to reflect briefly. On three ways. We might act. Accordingly. In light of this vision.
- So first of all. Whereas fulfillment. As people define it now. Looks backwards. This tells us. As our fulfillment. Looks forward. Instead of fulfillment.
- Now. We pray for. Faithfulness. In response. To this vision. Faithfulness. To overcome. The idolatry of power. Faithfulness.
- To overcome. Counterfeit. Gospels. And faithfulness. To withstand. Cultural compromise. It's going to look different. For each of you. And in different ways. But there's a line.
- [11 : 13] From a movie trailer. I saw recently. I was reading an article. On the worst movies. Of this year. This movie won a Razzie. If you're not familiar. If you want to. Receive an award. For a terrible movie. You get a Razzie.

But I watched the trailer. To see why this movie. Was so bad. And one of the characters. Said something interesting. It's a good line. But I'd like to correct it. A little bit. He said. Don't let the now.

Destroy the forever. Don't let the now. Destroy the forever. It's pretty good. It's halfway there. But I think it will be better written. Let the forever. Define the now.

Because what we do. Doesn't change the forever. That awaits those who are in the book. Of the lamb. But it motivates us. To be faithful in the present. So first of all.

Faith. Fulfillment looks forward. Secondly. We hold our longings for fulfillment. Up to this vision. And when we hold it up to the vision. Sometimes we're going to see a glimpse.

[12 : 10] Of this forever. And we can give thanks. I know you've all had this experience. A moment. An experience. A time. You've just gotten a taste. And a glimpse.

Of the glory that awaits. And we can give thanks for that. We can say. Lord. We thank you. That you have placed eternity. In our hearts. But at other times. When we hold up.

The things that offer fulfillment. To this vision. We are invited to repent. We say. God. I'm sorry. I see how I am seeking fulfillment. That conflicts with this vision.

And I know. It wouldn't satisfy me. It would actually hurt me. So when we hold it up in contrast. We can give thanks. For the small tastes we receive. And we can repent. When we're pulled in other directions.

And finally. Our fulfillment. Is found in the presence. Of the triune God. It's what C.S. Lewis described. As the eternal weight. Of glory. It's what awaits.

[13 : 09] When we see God face to face. You'll be the youest you. In his presence. Your infinite longings. Will meet. An infinite source.

And Jesus' work on the cross. The tree of life. Has opened this door. And if you have walked through the door. Renew your hope. But if you haven't.

Would you? So this is what fulfillment looks like. And where it comes from. It's what. Helps us have perspective. When we face the same challenges.

Those seven churches found. And I would encourage you. The book of the revelation of Jesus. Was meant to be read aloud. And read in one setting. I encourage you to do that. It might take you about 45 minutes or so.

It's a powerful way. To recapture that vision. Of what awaits. And now I want to close. With a reflection. On our story of God series.

[14 : 07] I found this series. So helpful to me personally. In my imagination. And in my ability to. See myself. In God's story. And hopefully to explain to others.

Who might say. What is being a Christian all about? I'm really thankful. For this new series. Of ways. Of understanding our place. In the story. So the goal of this series.

Has been to equip you. With a vocabulary. And an imagination. Animated by scripture. Placing yourself. And others in it. If you want to rehearse yourself. In the story. You can grab the study guide.

It's online. There's a PDF. There's an introductory part. That explains the entire scope. Of the series. What I found really helpful. Is to remember. That we're part of a story. Of a God who speaks.

A God who dwells. And a God who reigns. With specific passages of scripture. That help us tell. What that actually means. To live in this story. But I want to close with something.

[15 : 01] That Janet Morris. Who helps to write the study guides. She noticed this. When she wrote this part. And I found it so beautiful. We have in our passage. In Revelation 21 through 22.

A snapshot. Of this entire series. I want to just show you. How this is drenched in scripture. And how it informs where you are. And how you can describe this to others.

We see the creation in Genesis. The Lord creates a new heaven. And a new earth. Where his people have full. And free access.

To the tree of life. And secondly. The revelation in Deuteronomy. We have the revealing light. Of God's word. Becoming the fullness. Of the light. Of his presence.

His covenant promises. In Jeremiah. God's promise. That I will be their God. And they will be my people. In Jeremiah. Is abundantly fulfilled. His incarnation.

[15 : 58] In Luke. God is fully present. With his people. And they see him face to face. His sacrifice. In Hebrews. The one who died. As a sacrificial lamb.

Is now seated. On the throne. Declaring. It is finished. His gift. Of the spirit. In John. The water of life. Is identified by Jesus. As the Holy Spirit.

Which in this vision. Is not merely a trickle. But an entire river. His building up. Of the church. In Ephesians. The church is now. Fully built up. And adorned.

Beautifully. As the bride. In the new Jerusalem. In his gospel call. To the nations. In Ephesians. The leaves. Of the tree. Of life. Are for the healing. Of the nations. Who have been brought in.

By the gospel. Isn't that beautiful? The whole story. Of God. In Revelation. I want to leave you. With these words. From the end. As we go from here. The end of Revelation.

[16 : 54] The spirit. And the bride. Say. Come. And the one. Who hears. Says. Come. And let the one.

Who is thirsty. Come. Let the one. Who desires. Take the water. Of life. Without price. Amen.