

The Church and Its Destiny

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[0 : 00] This evening we enter into a whole new world, literally. Revelation 21. And I must confess that as I've been mulling over this passage and steeping in it, the song from the movie Aladdin has actually been flowing from my mouth.

A whole new world, don't you dare close your eyes. Because it is amazing. So don't close them. Because it's really, really good. Now, we come to this passage at the end of our series on the church.

And that's intentional. So I want to take just a couple minutes to backtrack through our series and show us that Revelation 21 is actually the fulfillment of all God's purposes for the church. It's the destiny of the church. Our series on the church began in Matthew chapter 16, where Jesus made a promise to Peter. He said, And in Revelation 21, we see that the gates of hell are destroyed.

And the church reigns victorious with her Lord. The church suffering becomes the church triumphant. In Colossians chapter 3, Paul talks about the hidden life of the church.

[1 : 15] He says, In Hebrews chapter 12, we're told about the present privilege of the church.

The writer says, And in Revelation 21, this present privilege becomes an eternal privilege.

The heavenly city comes down out of heaven and replaces all corrupt and idolatrous earthly cities. In 1 Peter 2, Peter tells us about the God-given identity of the church.

He says, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. And in Revelation 21, we see that the God-given identity of the church gets even better than that. It's the bride of Christ.

[2 : 57] The entire new city is the temple of God. In John chapter 1, 1 John chapter 1, we hear about the fellowship of the church. John says he writes, So that you may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. And in Revelation 21, the church's fellowship is perfected and secured for all eternity. We actually get to see God face to face.

And then finally, last week, Aaron told us about Matthew 28. Jesus sends his church on a mission. Jesus says, And in Revelation 21, we see the end of the age.

We see that the mission is complete. When the kings of the earth and the nations of the world bring their honor and glory into the city of God and worship the one true Lord of the universe.

And so Revelation 21 is the fulfillment of all God's purposes for his people. But it's more than that. Revelation 21 is also the fulfillment of all God's purposes for all of creation.

[4 : 20] It's the restoration and perfection of all that was lost in Genesis chapter 3. God's salvation, we find out in Revelation 21, is as wide as his creation.

Indeed, his salvation is a new creation. That's why John begins, I saw a new heaven and I saw a new earth. And this is important for us because the destiny of the church is not some disembodied fairyland.

It's not a fairytale world. Yes, it will be very different. Yes, it will be utterly different and transformed. And it will be beyond anything we can imagine.

But it will be the restoration of the whole creation. Not its destruction. Indeed, the Bible, the very first scene of the Bible begins with these words.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the very first words of the last scene of the Bible are, Behold, I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[5 : 25] God will restore all things. But not only is Revelation 21 the fulfillment of all God's purposes for the church, and the fulfillment of all God's purposes for all of creation, Revelation 21 speaks to us right now in a very particular way.

Actually, in two ways. First, it purifies and it redirects. Revelation 21 is actually meant to purify our imaginations and redirect the longings of our hearts.

As citizens of earthly cities, we know that we're inundated by pictures and images and symbols and voices, right? We're constantly being told, what should we look forward to?

What should we hope for? What should we desire and love and want and aspire to? I mean, you walk to the bus stop and you sit on the bus stop and there's an advertisement staring at the side of your face.

You get onto the bus and there's advertisements hovering above your head. You walk into a local coffee shop or cafe and there's music going and there's ambiance and there are images everywhere.

[6 : 44] You watch TV. I was watching a TV show the other day. There were six commercials in a half hour show. I was unimpressed. And they were the exact same series of commercials all six times.

You go on the internet. You watch a YouTube video and you've got to watch a commercial first. You go on Facebook or you go, you do a search on Google or something and there's sidebars full of commercials.

And all these images fill our imaginations. And they shape the way we see the world. The way we respond to the world. And the way that we live in the world.

And they shape our desires and the longings of our hearts to want certain things. And don't be deceived. These are not neutral images. They have agendas.

Especially during Christmas of all times. They want you to believe that whatever they are selling is actually what's going to fulfill you. They want you to believe that whatever they're selling is actually what is going to make you truly human.

[7 : 50] You must have it. You must consume. I was walking through the women's shoe section of the bay the other day. Don't ask me why. And I was checking out these shoes and I was looking in the shoe.

And every time you look in a shoe there would be a sticker inside the shoe that said this. Four words. Buy more. Save more. Buy more.

Save more. So every time I picked up a sparkly bedazzled pink shoe. It said buy more. Save more.

And that's just one example of many in our culture.

And John understands this in the book of Revelation. He understands how images and words fill our hearts and minds from our world. For he wrote the book of Revelation to seven churches in seven major cities in the ancient world.

And they were cosmopolitan places just like Vancouver. And what he does in Revelation is he offers Christians a different set of images to fill their imagination.

[8 : 57] He offers them a different way of seeing the world, of responding to the world, and to living in the world. And so Revelation 21 purifies our imaginations with the truth of God and redirects our hearts with the grace of God.

That's what it's intended to do. The second thing it's intended to do. It's intended to challenge and encourage. It challenges our priorities and commitments.

What do we hold dear in love? But it also encourages us to live according to God's future eternal world that he's bringing in. At the beginning of this Advent season, we're approaching Christmas and we're starting to get ready, aren't we?

I mean, why else would I be in a women's shoe section? Other than getting ready for Christmas.

We're starting to get ready. Our priorities are changing. We're using our time differently.

Our relationships are taking different focus. Our commitments are shifting. Because we are preparing in the present for this glorious future event that we call Christmas, right?

[10 : 05] So it changes the way that we live now because we're getting ready for the future. And that's exactly what Revelation 21 does to us. It gives us a different picture, a grander picture of the future.

And it shows us where we're heading. It shows us what God cares about. And in so doing, it puts the present context of our life in a new perspective. It shines light on what we care about in our commitments.

And it challenges some of them. It says, that's not really important. That's not really important. Don't get worked up about that. And it encourages us to live according to the eternal reality that God is

bringing us to.

To live now in light of God's future. So not only are we purified and redirected, but we are also challenged and encouraged by this passage.

Alright, take a deep breath. That was just the introduction. So, it's going to be a long one. But hang with me.

[11:11] Now we're actually going to get into the text.

That was a lot of preamble, but it was important. Now we're going to get into the text. And I'm not going to exhort you to do one thing for the next 15 minutes. I'm just going to do as best I can to take Revelation 21 and speak it as clearly as I can.

And so it just washes over our heart. And we come out of this place just longing for a new world. So let's do it. Get out your Bible.

Because God, through an angel, gives John a vision and a word. John sees what has never been seen before.

And John hears what has never been heard before. John says four times, or he says three times, I saw. Verse 1, I saw.

[12:09] Verse 2, I saw. Verse 22, I saw. And in verse 10, he says, the angel showed me. And then John hears. Verse 3, I heard a voice.

Verse 5, he was seated on the throne, said. Verses 9 and 15, the angel spoke to me. In Revelation 21, John sees a vision and he hears a word.

And he wants us to see what he saw and hear what he heard. What did he see? Verse 1, I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

New creation. Verse 2, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband.

Holy city, adorned bride. Verse 22, I saw no temple in the city. Why? Why no temple?

[13:11] Because God is the temple, he says. And God fills the whole city. So the whole city is the temple. We'll get to that later. So what did John see?

John saw a new creation, a holy city, adorned bride, and divine temple. And notice how this describes a people, a place, and a presence.

It's God's people and God's place in God's presence. God's people. A bride of Christ. This is the church. God's place. New heavens, new earth.

Holy city. God's presence. The divine temple. God's people in God's place in God's presence. And what John does is he takes all four of these images and he weaves them together in such a way that he tries to help our minds imagine what is simply unimaginable.

He takes these words and puts them together to try to describe what human words ultimately can't describe so that we too can see what he saw and can hear what he heard.

[14:21] And I think what John saw and what he heard can be described in three adjectives. Pure, beautiful, and intimate. Absolute purity.

Extravagant beauty. And perfect intimacy. So let's begin with absolute purity. The new creation is pure beyond belief.

God has touched every aspect of it with his holiness. And this purity is shown to us by what will not be there and what will be there. John makes it really clear the old order of things has passed away. Look at verse one. The first heaven and the first earth have passed away. Verse four. The former things have passed away. That's the old world.

The life dominated by chaos and sin and death and decay is no longer there. It's gone. John describes this. Look at verse one. The sea was no more.

[15:23] In the ancient world, the sea was symbolic of chaos and darkness and death. And it doesn't exist in God's new world. Verse four. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In John chapter 11, it says that Jesus wept over human pain and suffering. And now that very same Lord wipes away human tears. The one who knows our tears wipes away our tears.

The one who weeps does away with weeping. It no longer exists in the new city. Verse four. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.

So all sickness and disease, gone. All brokenness and sin, gone. All rebellion and idolatry, gone. All poverty and greed, gone.

All slavery and injustice, gone. All war and death, gone. And say goodbye to it forever. Because it's never coming back in God's new city. Never to return, says John.

[16:31] And that's why we see in verse 25, he says, There will be no more night. Because night represents evil and darkness and all that opposes God.

And it just simply won't be there. And in verse 27, there will be nothing unclean and no one who does what is detestable or false. It won't be there.

And what happens is this old order of the world gets replaced by a completely new world order. Look at verse 1 and 2. John emphasizes the newness of this future existence.

He describes it as a new heaven and a new earth. A new Jerusalem. And then in verse 5, he actually quotes God himself speaking from the throne, saying, Behold, I am making all things new. And so it's a completely new world. It's a completely new quality of existence, characterized by purity beyond belief. It's a holy city full of truth and goodness.

[17:38] No more locks on the doors. No more bars on the windows. No more police and security cameras. Not necessary in this world. It's going to be a gift from God.

A spotless, blameless, perfect gift. And new people are going to be in it. The people written in the book of life. That's number one.

Absolute purity. Number two. Extravagant beauty. God's new creation is beautiful. It's absolutely stunning. It's amazing.

It's absolutely beautiful. And it's beautiful because it is filled with the glory of God. Glory is the beauty and perfection of God's character.

Or I like the way Sam Storms puts it. He says, Glory is what you see and experience and feel when God finally goes public with his beauty. Or I like the way Daryl Johnson puts it.

[18:38] Glory is the luminosity of the weightiness of the living God. And it touches the whole new creation. Revelation 21 is filled with images of glory.

Look at verse 11. The holy city Jerusalem radiates the glory of God. And the glory is described visually in verses 18 to 21.

The whole city is like pure gold. And it's like clear glass. And its foundations are adorned with the finest jewels. And the jewels are so colorful.

I looked up the colors of the jewels. And it's like various greens and blues. And purples. And yellows. And reds. And whites. These are the colors of paradise.

It's as if paradise and a city have been smashed together. And everything is dazzling with the splendor of God. And radiating with his light and his glory. It's tremendous.

[19:40] But John pushes it even further. Look at verse 23. The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it. For the glory of God gives it light.

And its lamp is the lamb. So the whole city is filled with the glory of God. Jesus Christ, the one who once came into the world and said, I am the light of the world, now dwells in the midst of the city and fills every single nook and cranny with his light.

It's a beautiful paradise. Everything is purified so that the glory of God can be reflected and resounded and shared and displayed by everything in the city.

Everything expresses the unbelievable extravagance of the beauty of the living God. It's wonderfully beautiful. That's number two.

Number three is the best. It's perfectly intimate. I've been waiting all week to share this point with you guys. It's perfectly intimate. God's new creation is so intimate.

[20:52] Everything is embraced in his loving fellowship. At the center of new creation is a marriage between Christ and the church.

And this imagery is highly covenantal. Look at verse three. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. One scholar said that this verse could be said to sum up and contain the whole theology of the Bible.

The Old and New Testament look forward to this day and find their fulfillment in this day. When God's people dwell with the living God in eternal fellowship.

And notice the direction. God comes down to make his home with humanity. We don't go up. God comes down. And he goes all the way down to be with us.

[21:54] It's wonderful. God dwelling with us here. In perfect fellowship. But there's more. John pushes the image of intimacy even further.

Look at verse 16. In verse 16, John describes the measurement of the city. Now, I know you thought this was pretty random. Like, why in the world the measurement of the city? But this is really good. Verse 16. The city lies four square. Its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod 12,000 stadia. Which is about 1,400 miles. Its length and its width and its height are equal. The city's length and its width and its height are equal. It's a perfect cube. Now, why is that important? Why a perfect cube? John was steeped in the Old Testament. He would have known that in the Old Testament, there was only one perfect cube that was ever spoken of. [23 : 00] Only one perfect cube. It was 20 cubits by 20 cubits by 20 cubits. It was equal in width and length and height. It was the inner sanctuary of the temple. The holy of holies. So here, John is telling us that the whole new city is the holy of holies. The holy of holies can't be contained in God's new world. Rather, it is expansive and contains everything within itself. And every part of the city is the holy of holies. God's immediate presence unhindered. God's immediate presence everywhere. God's immediate presence all-encompassing. It's a perfect cube. But that's not it. John pushes the image of intimacy even further. Look at verse 22. I saw no temple in the city. [23 : 59] No temple? That's what the whole Bible seems to be about. God dwelling with his people. Why no temple? Verse 22. Because the temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb. So John just told us that the whole city is the holy of holies. And now John tells us that God himself is the temple. The holy of holies is in the heart of the temple. And God is the temple. The city is in the heart, the center of the temple. And God is the temple. John's pushing language to the breaking point. Somehow this city, this new city, dwells in the living God. And God dwells in the city. Somehow this new city lives in the living God. [24 : 56] And God lives in this new city. It's an intimacy that is unbelievable and inexpressible. God's immediate presence everywhere and unhindered. But there's more. John takes this even further. The people of God will see the face of the living God. Look at verse 4 in chapter 22. They will see his face. And his name will be on their foreheads. And the apostle Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 13. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. This face-to-face intimacy. Knowing the living God as he knows us. Seeing the living God as he sees us. Delighting in the living God as he delights in us. [26 : 31] John says, And it makes complete sense why the very last book of the Bible. And the very last chapter of the last book of the Bible. Ends with a prayer. Come Lord Jesus, come. Three times it says it. The spirit and the bride say, come. Let the one who hears say, come. And finally John himself says, Come Lord Jesus, come. And we add to that our own voices. Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.