

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

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be full of the hope of glory.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. You may be seated. I'll begin with a quote.

Most people, if they really learn to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and they want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world.

There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

C.S. Lewis continues. He says, probably earthly pleasures were meant to actually elicit this desire for us in the first place.

[1 : 18] So we should never despise or be unthankful for the earthly blessings that God has given us. But on the other hand, we should never mistake the earthly blessings God has given us for our true country, and let them squelch in us that desire for another world.

I must make it the main object of my life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same.

End quote. The purpose of Revelation 21 and 22 is to give us a vision designed to make our hearts hungry for heaven.

A breathtaking picture that no human heart this side of heaven can fully take in. You may have heard somebody say once that some people are so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good.

John thinks that nothing could be further from the truth. It's only as people have their minds set on heaven that they are true earthly good.

[2 : 44] And John was very aware of this because he was on the island Patmos. He had been exiled because of his faith as a Christian, cast out from society and connection with community.

And he was writing to seven churches who were throughout Asia Minor in seven different major cities who were finding it really hard to continue following Jesus under the pressures that they were experiencing in the city.

So John isn't just an armchair theologian writing to some people who have a nice little life. He is somebody who is writing under pressure to people who are under pressure.

And there were three major temptations that these Christians in the cities of the first century were facing. They were facing first the temptation to compromise with the world's values. You know, we just wouldn't feel so much pressure if we weren't so different.

Number two, the temptation to depend on their own strength. Under pressure, they try to be creative and clever and figure out their own solutions instead of relying on the Lord.

[3 : 47] And number three, the temptation to fold under persecution. Is following Christ really worth it? And God gives his people in the churches of these cities a vision.

He doesn't raise his voice at them. He doesn't exhort them to try harder. He doesn't give them more and more theological doctrines to believe, although theology is very important.

He gives them a vision of the beauty of the world to come, and he wants it to capture their hearts.

He wants them to long for what's on the horizon when the Lord Jesus Christ comes, so that in the present moment, no matter how difficult it is, they cling to the one who will be king for all eternity.

So how does John describe this inexpressible beauty which no eye has seen nor ear has heard, but which God is trying to reveal to him? Well, three Ps, because every preacher loves good three Ps.

A people, a place, and a presence. The beauty of this world, Revelation 21 and 22, is God's people in God's place in God's presence. But I want to begin with place.

[5 : 01] In the final vision of the Bible, this vision, I'm going to try to do this. We're dealing with two pretty big chapters here, so work with me. I think this vision unfolds as a series of concentric circles.

You know what that means? Circles within one another. And I think it moves from the outside in. So the first concentric circle, and by the way, the innermost circle is normally the most important one. So outermost concentric circle is verse, is 21, verse 1. John sees a new creation. You see that? Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. This is just hearkening back to the first verse of the Bible.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. So first circle, new creation. Second circle, a new city within the new creation. So look at verse 2 of chapter 21.

And I saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. And then we're going to get into this a little more later, but the bulk of chapter 21 is devoted to describing this new city.

[6 : 02] But the third concentric circle is a new garden. Flip over to verse 1 of chapter 22. The final chapter there. There's a garden in the middle of the city.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb right through the middle of the street of the city. And on either side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit in each month for the healing, its leaves for the healing of the nations.

So you have a new creation, a new city, and within that a new garden. And finally, in verse 3, the innermost circle, John sees a throne. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it.

So the glory of the new creation and the city and the new garden radiates from the center. So John goes from the outside in, but once he gets to the center, he shows us what is animating the life of the new creation.

It's God and the Lamb who share a throne. And you'll notice this four times in our passage. God and the Lamb are paired together. It's glory of God and the Lamb, light of God and the Lamb, throne of God and the Lamb, throne of God and the Lamb.

[7 : 22] The two are always paired together. And this actually reveals something that's quite astonishing about the world to come. It is a Trinitarian glory that fills the new creation. It's not an impersonal, lonesome light of God, but the personal, energetic light and life of God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I mean, just think about this for a moment with me. That sounds like really high academic language or something. But this is actually amazing. What John is saying is he's saying every facet of the new creation, from the gems that pave the streets to the people that praise his name, every facet of the new creation orbits like planets around the sun, and it's the beauty and love and the fellowship that God the Father and the Son have always experienced in the love of the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

And as if that weren't enough, John pushes the vision even further. Oh, this is deep. There's no temple in the city.

Did you notice that? Verse 22 of chapter 21. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb.

God is everywhere. And then if you scan up a little bit to verses 15 and 16 in chapter 21, we're given the measurements of the city.

[8 : 58] So first we're told there's no temple, and then we're given the measurements of the city. And if you look at verse 15, it says, the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold. So even the measuring tapes in the new creation are made of gold.

And he measures the city, its gates and its walls, and the city lies four square. Its length is the same as its width, so it's a square.

And he measured the city with its rod. It's about 12,000 stadia. And its length and its width and its height are equal. Notice what he did there. He went from a square to a cube.

Length, width, and height are equal. Now why in the world would you point this out? It's really simple. The only place in the Old Testament where we ever see something measured that is a perfect cube is the Holy of Holies in the temple.

So what is John trying to communicate to us that is being shown to him by the Lord Jesus himself? It's not just that there's no temple because God's presence is everywhere.

[9 : 57] It is that the holiest of holies in all of creation, which was in the center of the temple, has now become synonymous with all of creation. The whole city and the whole new creation is now the Holy of Holies in God's presence.

I think that's why there's so much emphasis in our passage, not only on what is there, but did you notice, as it was read, all the things that are not there as well.

If this place is perfectly holy, the Holy of Holies, and there is not one square inch of the whole domain of this new existence that is not holy, then it means there will be nothing that contradicts that holiness.

So, we get in verse 21 of chapter 21, there is no more sea, which in the ancient world is just symbolic of the chaotic forces of evil that make our world unstable and unpredictable.

There's a lot of us that are experiencing that right now as we look at the news headlines. We're told in verse 4 of chapter 21, there will be no more tears and death and mourning and crying and pain. There will be no voice of anxiety and sound of suffering in the streets because there will be no more reason for it anymore.

[11 : 12] We're told in verse 25 that the gates will not be shut. Think about that. Gates were shut, like you shut the door to your house and you lock it at night. It's normally to protect yourself while you're sleeping.

In that world, there will be no need for protection because there will be no threat of evil. That's why there's no night because night is that symbol of vulnerability.

As you sleep, anything could happen to you or your city. But there will be no vulnerability. It will be beyond that in God's immortal life. Nothing unclean, nothing accursed, no one who does what is detestable or false.

This picture of the new creation is God's place. That's the first thing that we see. But what's so lovely about this new creation is God doesn't want to be in his place alone.

He wants to be with people. About 10 years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Barcelona. Or if you're actually from Spain, they say Barcelona.

[12 : 20] I could never quite get used to that. And as I visited my favorite, what is now my favorite cathedral, La Sagrada Familia. And I was prejudiced against it before I went because it was a modern cathedral and I was like, they're just not going to get it.

They're just not going to get it. It's not going to be the same as the old stuff. And as I walked into this building, it was astonishing because all the columns in the building going all the way down from front to back, both sides, were shaped like trees.

So the pillars and the columns were like trees that branches then held up the ceiling. And it was all white stone. And on one side, all of the stained glass windows were shades of blue and green to represent the image of water.

So the water of life. And as the sun would shine, that would reflect across all this white stone. And then on the other side, you had all these shades of yellow and orange and red, images of light, God's light, as being the light of the world.

And that would shine through the whole place. And so you would have this image. The way it was constructed is to be a picture of the Garden of Eden that is coming. The new garden, where you have trees of life and where you have the light of God and you have the living waters and you're bathed and immersed in the whole thing.

[13 : 42] But notice how the name of it is the Holy Family. So there's this sense in which the architecture is saying as you enter into the church, as you enter into the people of God and the family of God, you are actually entering into the new garden, the new Eden, the new creation.

The church is God's new creation starting in this world that is passing away. And I think something similar to this, this blending of metaphors, is actually happening in Revelation 21.

We're told that the city is also a bride. Think about that. It's not just a new creation scene that we're given. We're given a wedding ceremony here. So look at verse 2 of chapter 21.

It says, And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband. City as a bride. And then down in verse 9.

Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, having

the glory of God.

[14:51] So we're told the city is a bride, and then we're told the bride is a city. And most of chapter 21 is devoted to describing the beauty of this bride in this new city.

It's an image of a bride, and she is covered in jewelry, gold and precious jewels.

In verses 19 to 21, there are 12 jewels that are named in particular. And you may be wondering, why in the world 12 jewels? You actually check back in the Old Testament, nine of these 12 jewels are exactly the same ones that the high priest wore on his breastplate, representing the 12 tribes of Israel when he went into the temple to offer sacrifice and prayer and represent the people before God.

So there is this image here of 12 gems representing the 12 tribes of Israel, the whole people of God. And then added to this people is the glory of kings of the earth and the glory and honor of nations.

I mean, in our world right now, like, if you look at the geopolitics of our world right now, it's a troubling place to be. It's a threatening place to be. And yet here, the image is that the only kings that will be permanent, that will be lasting, that will be a part of the new creation are those that are willing to bring their glory and honor to the Lamb and lay it down before His throne in praise.

[16:25] I mean, how great would it be if the leaders of our world were doing that right now? And in the new creation, the only leaders who will be there are those who lay things down at the foot of the Lamb.

So for all of history, God has been preparing this bride for Himself. And now for all of eternity, God will relish being in the presence of His bride. And His bride will relish being in the presence of His love.

And then comes the final piece of the Bible's final vision, presence. God's people in God's place, place in God's presence. And the way I've been describing place and presence has been trying, and place in people has been trying to point you to presence all along the way.

So verse 3 of chapter 21. Are we doing okay, by the way? I'm asking a lot of you right now. It's kind of like drinking from a fire hose. But I'm hoping we'll do a little bit of application at the end, which will be helpful.

But look at verse 3. Verse 4. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with humanity. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.

[17:38] Verse 4. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Think about this for a second. This is an image. The first image we're given is not of us seeing the face of God.

It's of God seeing our face and seeing the tears coming from our face. Knowing the reasons behind those tears. And wiping every tear.

Don't you love that? It doesn't just say, like, all the tears. Wiping tears. It says, wiping every individual tear. It's God seeing our face.

And then if you flip over to chapter 22, and you see verse 4, which I was really tempted just to preach a whole sermon on this one verse. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

We will see the face of the God who sees us. That's where we're heading. And I want to submit to you that this is the greatest blessing of all the blessings of the new creation.

[18:43] Like, we could have the fanciest world in the world. We could have all our friends and family and loved ones and none of those people that really annoy us. We could have everything that we really want, and unless we have the face of God, we're never going to be satisfied.

We were made for face-to-face communion with God, to glorify Him forever by enjoying Him forever. I think this is so hardwired into us that it's actually just a part of our life.

Like, what is the first thing that a baby sees when they're born? They're brought close, and they see their mother's face. And as far as we can tell, babies actually don't have that great a sight.

They can only see about this far. But it's far enough for them to see a face who's looking at them. Even adults.

I discovered some videos on YouTube months ago where there was this little... It must have been counselors or psychologists behind this experiment. But they took complete strangers, they put them in a room with no distractions, had them in chairs facing one another, and they had to look each other in the eyes for five straight minutes without talking.

[19 : 58] This face-to-face experience, and people were so awkward at first. You know, they're just like squirming. I mean, can you imagine doing that? What's happening? And then like half the time, by the end of five minutes, somebody would be crying.

Just astonishing. And I think it showed that it taps into something deep in every human heart from birth to death. This longing to see and be seen. This longing to know and be known and love and be loved.

And according to Revelation, this is the crown jewel of the new creation. This is the pulsating heart. I dare even say, God's face will be so beautiful that we might be tempted to miss the glory of the beauty of the creation around us.

The opposite of the way it is in this world. To behold the face of God, unhindered sight, of unfiltered light, rich in glory, rich in mercy, deep with compassion, lavish with love, for all eternity.

And we know that he is all we need. And in that day, he will finally be all that we want. Face-to-face communion. In the new garden, in the new city, in the new creation, for the glory of God and the Lamb.

[21 : 16] And the question that I've been sitting with this week is like, how do we respond to such beauty? I just, it's too much for the human heart to take in.

God's people and God's place, like how are we supposed to live now in light of that day? And how do we do it faithfully? How do we do it faithfully? Well, I think John helpfully gives us three not-so-subtle clues.

A claim, a cry, and a call. He invites us to trust a claim, to join the cry, and to answer the call. So first, trust the claim.

At the very, at the beginning of the vision, if you look in chapter 21, verse 5, you'll see that he who is seated on the throne says, behold, I am making all things new.

And then just following that, he also says, write this down, John, for these words are trustworthy and true. Oh, thanks.

[22 : 23] Thanks. That's good to know. And then flip over to verse 6 in chapter 22, after this whole vision we've just received.

Then in verse 6, he says to John again, these words are trustworthy and true, John. Write them down. It's a vision that is meant to communicate to the hearts and minds of God's people the trustworthiness and the truthfulness of the God who gives this vision.

And this is something that we doubt most easily when we are in seasons of suffering or fear or uncertainty, is that what God says is trustworthy or true.

because the world that we see or the promises that we hear from God feels so different than what we experience. And God knows that about us so he gives us a vision and he says, I want you to be assured that I'm going to do what I said I will do and I want to strengthen your trust in me when you're tempted to compromise.

I'm going to make all things new. And then he even goes on to say at some point, like this is as good as done. I am the alpha and the omega. So don't give in.

[23 : 43] Trust. Trust the claim. Second, join the cry. The cry is really simple. It's one word and you can pray it from anywhere at any time.

Come. So look, verse chapter 22, verse 17. I'm straying outside of the bounds of our passage. But verse 17, chapter 22, the Spirit and the Bride, so the Holy Spirit and the Church, say, come.

And let the one who hears these words now say, come. And then down to verse 20, he who testifies to these things, the Lord Jesus himself, says, surely I'm coming soon.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Three times, when the Bible repeats anything three times, it's like, listen up. Come. And what I love about this cry, it's just so magnificent, is I think this cry emerges out of two realities.

I think on the one hand, this cry emerges out of the future. It's what we have just been shown by God, if it is trustworthy and true, it is so magnificently beautiful, we want that as soon as possible.

[24 : 51] Come. That's what I was made for. That's what my heart longs for. God, bring it. And yet, I think it also emerges from the present moment.

Because when we live in our world now, we know that the world right now is not that world. We know that it's still tinged with the sound of suffering and pierced with the sting of death and poisoned with the strength of sin.

I was just talking to people today who, who looking in the world right now and the wars and rumors of war, it just feels like everything around is so threatening. We're groaning for a new creation. We're thirsty for the effects of sin to finally be taken away. We want to be lifted from the burdens of sorrow that we experience so deeply. And so, this cry emerges from this tension that we want that, Lord.

We want what you're bringing, so come, bring it. And yet, Lord, the reality of our lives is not that, Lord, so come, help me. And this cry, come, emerges from that peace, place, from the people of God.

[26 : 03] And it can emerge anywhere. It can emerge in the hospital room. It can emerge in the classroom. It can emerge in the garden. Lord Jesus, come.

And what I love about it also is that it says to us the hinge between our experience now and our experience then does not rest on our shoulders. It rests on the Lord Jesus' shoulders alone. He must do it and he will do it. So first, we trust the claim. Second, we join the cry. And finally, we answer the call.

Verse 6 of chapter 21, the second half of the verse. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

Flip over to chapter 22, verse 17. It's reiterated. The second half. After crying, come, and let the one who is thirsty come, and let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

[27 : 19] There's that little word desire again. This is where we began with C.S. Lewis. What do I desire? If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

And the purpose of Revelation 21 and 22 is to heighten our desire not only for the new creation but for the king of that creation, the Christ.

It acknowledges here that in this world we are spiritually thirsty and parched and totally dehydrated without him. That we were made to drink of Jesus' life daily and hourly and continually.

We were designed to have Christ as our sustenance and our constant refreshment. Our hearts were made to drink in his great life into our little lives.

And the grace that he offers us cost us nothing. It's without price. And it cost him his blood. Now the vision of Revelation, we must be clear, is a bit sobering because it tells us that not everybody is going to enter into this new creation.

[28 : 44] Not everybody is going to experience this life or drink from this well. There's this implicit sobering truth that judgment is going to be a part of the establishment of the new creation.

But John makes it very clear. In the end, judgment is only based on one thing. Did you come to Jesus to drink? He had living water for you? Did you come to drink?

Did you bank everything on what he had come to give you? The forgiveness of your sins and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Was your heart hungry to receive what Jesus came to give, namely himself?

It's beautiful because Christ gave himself on the cross for all who would receive him by faith. As we come to the table, Christ continues to distribute the riches of his grace and kindness to us as we are on our journey towards our destination.

And when we are in our destination, it will be nothing but feasting and drinking at the throne of God and of the Lamb for all eternity with all the saints.

[29 : 48] My brothers and sisters, it was a joy to speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.