

Vision of Eternal Rest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 December 2020

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Good morning all. Great to be with you again on church and online. Just let me add one more thing. This is effectively the close off of Vision 2020 and what an amazing journey it's been.

Someone who's been with us that whole time has been Nick and Sam. They've both been with us that whole time. And it's quite appropriate that today is their last day before they take seven weeks of long service leave at the end of Vision 2020.

So thank you guys. Thank you for serving us. In the next seven weeks, may you experience rest as we launch into looking at eternal rest now.

Let me pray as we begin. Gracious God, thank you for Nick, for Sam, for Isla, for Juddy. Thank you for their contribution to our church life.

And I pray that these next seven weeks for them will be a glimpse of heaven. I pray that they will drink deeply from you, that they will experience rest as a family and especially rest for their souls in you.

[1 : 12] So Lord, refuel them for the next stage of ministry. And as we launch into your word now, give us a vision, a clear vision of the end. And I pray, Lord, that our hearts will beat, that adrenaline will course as we look forward to the day coming.

Amen. And so as we close off Vision 2020 and as we close off Revelation and our time of celebration, we start looking to the future as we've already started to do.

I want to begin today by, as I've done on numerous occasions in the past, drawing our attention to the life of one of the greatest philosophical thinkers, one of the sharpest political minds, one of the most quoted individuals and widely respected entertainers of the past 100 years.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was born the son of a low-ranking Austrian police officer and he was destined to be a nobody until his hands wrapped around a barbell for the very first time.

By the age of 18, he was traveling the world, competing in bodybuilding championships. And at one point, he's living in England and his coach, Wag Bennett, said to him, Arnie, what do you want to do with your life?

[2 : 43] And Wag said Arnold's response was phenomenal for an 18-year-old. He said, I want to be the richest and the greatest bodybuilder of all time.

I want to live in the United States. I want to be an actor, a movie director. I want to own an apartment block and I want to have a political career.

18 years of age, he saw the vision of the future and that vision controlled his day-by-day actions.

One training partner, living and in fact working with Arnie at that time, said that Arnold was so focused on his future that on one occasion, we were doing reps with masses amounts of weight and he said, I did one more than Arnie.

And he said, Arnie looked at me and said, you'll never ever do that again. And he said, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how much training I did, I could never beat him from that moment.

He knew what he wanted, wasn't distracted, he saw the future and he went for it. You see, whatever we think the future is, it will determine how we live in the present, whether you're an atheist or a Christian.

[4 : 21] Your future determines how you live. So I want us to focus today, Revelation 21, 22, on a rock-solid certain future hope that should control how we live right now.

As I said last week, Revelation was not given to us to satisfy our curiosity about things in the future, but to open our eyes. It's there to prod us to become awake to the reality of what is and to stimulate and reform actions in our lives.

It opens our eyes to the Christian worldview. The crucified, resurrected Jesus is the one who reigns in heaven. His people suffer on earth with joy while being threatened and seduced by the powers

and cultures of its day.

God, however, is in control throughout the chaos of history and he has determined and he will come again to judge all of humanity and Christians are therefore called to remain faithful to Jesus and the good news about him as we wait for his return to wind up history and to bring us into his perfect presence forever.

Last week, we saw the destruction of Babylon, Babylon, the city which represents the representation of idolatrous human societies in all their forms which are set against the creator God. [5 : 51] By the end of chapter 20, all evil is dealt with and judged and as we launch into chapters 21 and 22, we're introduced to a new city. And we'll notice a number of contrasts between the two cities of Babylon, the prostitute, and Jerusalem, the bride.

Babylon seduced and corrupted the nations but Jerusalem is a light to the nations. Babylon is full of abominations and filth but impurity and deceit are excluded from Jerusalem.

In Babylon, wine intoxicates the nations. In Jerusalem, there is water of life and a tree of life for the healing of the nations.

God's people are called out of Babylon and they are called to enter Jerusalem. And so before us today is an alternative city, alternative Babylon, a place of eternal rest.

And I want us to see three things quickly from this today. And if you've got the St. Paul's app, I encourage you to open that up and you have those three things in front of you. The nature of eternal rest, receiving eternal rest, and thirdly, living for eternal rest.

[7 : 04] So the nature of eternal rest is in verse 2. It says, I saw the holy city, this is chapter 21, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

So the Bible describes here a vision of the end of the world history, the climax of history. It's a picture of heaven.

And this vision is not of individual souls rising up, escaping the world, going to a white, fluffy, cloudy place where we're playing harps.

That's not what we have here. What you see instead is heaven coming down and transforming the world.

That's what you see. The climax of God's plan is a rewoven, healed, perfected material world. A world where even the good things of this world are made to be infinitely better than they currently are.

[8 : 07] The Bible does not give us a picture of heaven where we hover around with wings amongst clouds, playing harps and communicating via mental telepathy.

It's a real material world like this one where people hug each other and walk and run and laugh and dance and kiss and eat and work and play. It's a place like we've never experienced in this world but it's also very, very similar to this world.

The Swiss Alps will be the Swiss Alps but perfected. I don't know how that's possible but it will be. Maybe the less skiers or something. I'm not sure what the deal is but it will be perfected. The difference is everything in this world is broken. Even the beautiful things.

There will be all pure, right and whole. Every one of us, every single human being has this sense, a longing for the perfect, for the complete.

[9 : 19] As good as this world might be at times, it doesn't give us the satisfaction that lasts. Even the best marriages will end. The best cars will rust.

The best holidays will be but a memory. It all leaves us longing for the next thing, the thing that will last. It might be longing for a body that we've never had, the approval that we've never had, the home that we've never had, a beach or a wave that we've never had, the family that we've never had.

Whatever it is, these chapters say that all of our desires for fulfillment and satisfaction and contentment is coming. Verse 3 tells us why it will be so right.

Why all of our hopes and our expectations will be fulfilled. It says, now the dwelling of God is with people and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Right at the beginning of the Bible we are told that's exactly what we were created for. It's what God's plan has been all along for him and his people to dwell together in perfect harmony. We have that at the beginning of the Bible at creation God dwells with his people in the Garden of Eden.

[10:43] They walk and they talk together. Everything is perfect. In fact, at the end of six days of creating it says that God rested. He wasn't tired.

Rest was the goal of creation. On the seventh day God rested. You don't then and then it was Monday again he had to get back to work. Rest was it.

The seventh day was it. Rest. All things in their proper order in harmony with each other for their joy is biblical rest.

And here at the end of all things God is again dwelling with his people in heaven. Rest. God has always planned and desired to be with his people in a state of perfect harmony.

Rest is the goal. But as we know in Genesis 3 that rest was totally ruined when we lost our relationship with God through sin.

[12:01] And on that moment even our relationship with our true selves was broken. Fell apart. Adam and Eve immediately began to experience fear and anxiety and their relationship with each other fell apart.

Their relationship with the physical world fell apart as the snake tempted Eve. They began to experience aging and disease and pain and death.

When your relationship with God falls apart everything falls apart. restlessness is the consequence. Constantly striving for contentment and satisfaction is the consequence. but when the relationship with God is put right every other relationship is put right.

Everything sad and broken and wrong will be wiped away. That is the day that's coming. For me I'm a diabetic I'm constantly hooked up to a pump and I've got hearing aids now and so everything's breaking.

[13:11] Everything's breaking. But for me that's not my major concern. The thing that I look forward to in heaven is not a new pancreas.

The thing that I look forward to more than anything else is the weight to be lifted. The weight to be gone.

The weight of expectations and the need to lead and the constant feeling of being a failure as a disciple and as a leader and everything to be gone to be lifted like that.

Heaven is a place of rest of endless joy happiness freedom fulfillment beauty love contentment. The future for the inhabitants of Babylon is darkness despair and loneliness.

The future for the members of the new Jerusalem the bride of Christ the church is light joy and intimate relationship. And that's what we see in the second half of chapter 21.

[14:22] In verse 9 one of the angels says to John come I will show you the bride the wife of the lamb and he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain high and great and he showed me the holy city.

So here's John taken away in a vision to see the bride the wife of the lamb and when he gets there what does he see? A city. Now the details of the rest of the chapter reveal an unusual city.

It's huge. It's a huge cube. 2200 kilometers by 2200 kilometers by 2200 kilometers.

That's massive. That's a lot of stories. Here to Townsville and somewhere further west and I don't know how many Mount Everest on top of each other.

An awful lot. The measurements and the details here are symbolic. This cube echoes the most holy place in Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6.

[15:32] The holy city is now the most holy place. The place where God meets with his people. In the past it was only the high priest who could ever enter the most holy place and only once a year and after very specific preparation the blood of Jesus has opened the way for every single person to now be in his presence forever.

The jewels on the high priest breastplate which represented the people of God are now embedded into the city walls. The old temple had one single entrance.

This one has gates on all four sides welcoming people from all four corners of the globe. The temple was the symbol of God's presence with his people and now that symbol has given way to reality.

It's not literally 2,200 by it's not literally a big cube.

These numbers are significant. This vision of the John C is so magnificent so incomprehensible that he tries to grab for language and symbols to try and describe the beauty and the magnificence of it.

[16:49] This is a city that contains all of God's people. All of God's people from Old Testament to New Testament that's what all the specific numbers are referring to.

That's the symbolism of it. And it's a city about the size of the world as they knew it at the time. The thick walls and the angelic watchmen on each gate which are never closed are references to its safety and its security.

Perfect relationship with God perfect relationship with all people and perfect relationship with the created order. It's hard to picture.

But imagine this world with everything negative everything broken sinful evil decaying dark destructive thing every one of those things taken out of it so that all that we have left is the stuff that's good whole light righteous loving kind and all of that stuff being perfected millions and millions of times over and you start to get a glimpse of what forever with God is going to be like.

Revelation 21 verses 4 and 5 really just sum it up. God will wipe away every tear with their eyes that we know more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

[18:24] He who was seated on the throne said I am making everything new. That is the hope of the Christian and that is the nature of our eternal rest.

So how do we get it? The simple answer is you believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and you cling to him all the days of your life.

Jesus' death is alluded to in verse 6 where it says to him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

As I said last week the John who gets this vision in Revelation is the John who wrote John's Gospel and what's standing behind verse 6 is John 4 where Jesus meets a woman at the well and says that he can give water to her that will mean that she will never ever be thirsty again and she thought this is fantastic you know get me buckets and I'll have some of that.

She of course thought he was talking about actual water he was talking about eternal life. Jesus offered her in that moment a foretaste of this new heaven and this new earth.

[19:40] The deepest longings of our life the longing for love the longing for value the longing for life to last are satisfied in and by Jesus. Jesus says that we can have it for free he offers it to us it says there without cost.

How is that possible? How is it possible that he can offer that to us without cost? Well at the end of John's gospel we have Jesus on the cross.

That's how it's possible. He's the one who has taken our sin to the cross. And one of the significant things he says at the end of John's gospel while he's on the cross he said a number of things but one of the significant things he said was I am thirsty.

I am thirsty. It wasn't just a physical thirst because straight afterwards he says my God my God why have you forsaken me?

On the cross Jesus was experiencing cosmic hopelessness so that we could experience living hope. On the cross Jesus experienced cosmic thirst separation from God that's what we deserve so that we could have the spring of the water of life instead.

[21:04] On the cross Jesus took the curse of God for our sin so that we can experience an eternal future of blessing in his presence. On the cross the sun went down at midday darkness fell so that we could experience an eternal future of light and glory and safety.

He was nailed to the cross of death so that we can have access to the tree of life. Jesus left the rest of heaven came into this world so that we could receive eternal rest with him forever.

And he didn't just die he rose again. His resurrection his new body is the first installment of everything being made new forever.

It all hinges on that. It all hinges on resurrection. So if you're sitting here today going pie in the sky Steve let's get historical for a moment.

Walk away from here and investigate the resurrection of Jesus. Historical resurrection of Jesus that is the first fruit of this promise here of eternal rest with Christ.

[22:20] If you need help doing that I'd be delighted to help you do that. his resurrection is a promise to us that this world is not everything and that there is hope beyond death.

His resurrection guarantees our resurrection with him and therefore guarantees our hope and he invites us to join him in it. So thirdly how does this future shape our present?

What does it mean to live for eternal rest? You see the person who knows that their destiny is glorious and certain because of the radical love and the sacrifice of a forgiving and loving God will be free and I mean set free to live the most radical life of love and sacrifice here on earth.

You see if someone picture this someone falls out of an aeroplane you're flying along right someone falls out of an aeroplane and they don't have a parachute on you don't go I'll jump out of the aeroplane and see if I can rescue them.

There's no point. Two deaths is not better than one. Doesn't make any sense. However if the person falls out of the aeroplane and you happen to have a parachute on then you just may in that moment attempt one of those James Bond kind of rescue attempts where you free fall like a bullet and you catch them and pull the cord and you rescue them.

[23 : 51] You see it is the hope of eternal rest safety and love in the end that releases radical sacrificial love right now.

So the book of Revelation and our future hope should cause the Christian to move away from lives of self-centeredness and flimsy loyalties and undisciplined devotion and presumption of God's patience into people whose lives are consistently living for more than self-preservation self-praise and self-fulfillment.

the Christian is not just the citizen of this city, New Jerusalem into the future, they're part of it right now.

And at the very least, what that means is that there is to some degree that we can in fact wipe away the tears of our city right now through acts of selfless love and mercy and justice.

The Christian hope is a life transforming living hope and not an abstract idea. These chapters were originally written to people who were suffering terrible things.

[25 : 18] they had homes taken away and plundered, as I said right at the beginning of this series. They were sent into the arena and torn apart by wild animals as the crowds watched and applauded.

Christians were impaled on stakes while still alive, covered with tar and set alight. They also suffered the daily struggle of not being seduced by the power and the affluence of Rome, the daily struggle of not planting their hopes firmly in a temporary empire.

That's what they faced. What does John give them? Free tickets to the Maldives? No.

Great career advancement? No. He gave them this is what he gave them. He gave them this.

He gave them the new heavens and the new earth. He gave them the glimpse of God's plan of the climax of history and it's a simple fact that when he gave them this, it worked.

[26 : 30] The early Christians took their suffering with such peace. They sang hymns as the beasts were tearing them apart and they forgave the people who were killing them. But the more the Christians were killed, the more the Christian movement grew and expanded because when people watched how Christians were dying, it became obvious to them that they had something different.

They obviously had a living hope. Us human beings, we are such hope-shaped creatures. Our hopes and our aspirations for the future determine how we live right now.

Imagine for a moment that I offered two of you a job starting tomorrow. Two people here offered a job and the job was I'm going to sit you at a table with an uncomfortable chair in a damp, dark, smelly, windless room for 10 hours a day, six days a week and your job is to screw widgets onto wadgets.

And if you don't know what they are, neither do I. Same room, exact same situation. But I take one of you aside and I say at the end of this year I'm going to give you \$5,000.

That's your job, give you \$5,000. The other one I take aside and say at the end of this year I'm going to give you \$10,000,000. One will quit before the year's out and the other will whistle while they work.

[28 : 04] They will experience exact same circumstances in utterly different ways because what they believe about their future. Do you believe that this world is all that there is and that when you die you rot?

Or do you believe in a new heavens and a new earth and a judgment day when all wrong is put right and all right is made even better?

depending on which one you believe you're going to live in two very different ways. People from every language culture, people from every people group have taken this living hope of a glorious future with their created God into the center of their lives and they have triumphed over the most harshest of circumstances.

That is what the hope of eternal rest does. And so for the Christian who's hearing this right now here in the room on the screen, mark the concluding message of Revelation from the mouth of the

Lord Jesus.

I am coming soon. Three times we read these three words, those words, four words in Revelation 22 verse 7, verse 12 and verse 20.

[29 : 31] The unveiling of the scroll has now happened. The scroll has been opened, the destiny of humanity has been revealed, the message of Revelation is complete and he says to us just wait a little longer.

Just wait. Verse 7 he says, I am coming soon therefore don't disobey this Revelation. May the message of this book shape your values, your priorities and your life day by day.

Verse 12 he says again, I am coming soon therefore don't hide this Revelation. This is not a book that gets put back on your shelf. These words are to be read, they are to be proclaimed.

This Revelation must remain open until Jesus returns and that all people get a chance to see and believe this final rest. Verse 20 Jesus says, I am coming soon, therefore do not meddle with this Revelation.

These words are final. There is not a better message, there is not a newer message, there is not a supplement to this message. Everything we need to know about human destiny has been revealed in this Revelation.

[30 : 44] Every single one of us here in this room on screen is living for the future. Every single one of us. That is, there is not a single human being who lives for the present.

It is a nonsense when people say, I am living for today. No, you are not. No, you are not. You are living for today because of what you think about the future.

So what is the future that has determined your life? Christianity declares there is no other, no greater hope than Jesus Christ, billions of people around this world have discovered it in the last 2,000 years.

And the closing verses of Revelation also has a message for those who have not yet embraced Jesus Christ. Chapter 22 verse 17 is an invitation for you, the non-Christian.

The spirit and the bride says, come. And let the one who hears say, come. Come. Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life, come.

[32 : 04] Come now to Jesus and find rest for your souls. Come to Jesus and find eternal rest. Come to Jesus and receive from him life and satisfaction and hope.

Come to Jesus and get a future that's worth waiting for and working for. Amen.