

Revelation

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[0 : 00] Believe it or not, today is our final message in Revelation, at least for this round. We'll probably get back to it at some point. It's a pretty good book. But this 13-week series is finally drawing to an end, and some of you might be breathing a sigh of relief.

Some of you might be really upset because you've enjoyed being in the one book for an extended period, and some of you don't remember the conversation you just had, let alone sermons from a week or 13 weeks ago, so you've got no idea what I'm talking about.

But the fact is, tonight is the last installment in our trip through Revelation for the last 13 weeks. And so it's really important for us, as we jump into this last scene, that we realize what it is that's drawing to a close.

This book of Revelation is not just a 13-week sermon outline that Jesus gave to John so that we would have something to do for this particular set of 13 weeks. It's a revelation.

It's a vision. It's a prophecy. It's a unit. And so we need to, as we draw to the close, be mindful of everything that's gone before. All 13 weeks, plus the 12 and a half chapters that we didn't actually get to deal with in detail.

[1 : 08] So there is a lot that we need to try and squash back into our minds. You need to remember the wonder and the amazement and the encouragement and maybe the fear as well.

All the different things that God has pushed into your mind and heart over the last 13 weeks because that ride is about to come to an end. Revelation is about to finish.

And it almost feels a bit like that feeling you get when holidays is over. It doesn't matter how amazing your holiday was. It doesn't matter how refreshing it was laying on the beach and doing nothing.

It doesn't matter how fantastic or how long it was. The moment you turn back into your street or back into your driveway, it's like it just fades away into the distance and reality comes racing back. I've got to go to school tomorrow. I've got to get up and go to work in the morning. I've got to get up and make lunches for the kids tomorrow. Whatever it is, reality comes racing back into focus. And so as this vision ends, we need to focus and be aware of everything that's gone before.

[2 : 08] What I want you to try and do is I want you to do your best to imagine that you are John, to put yourself in his shoes. So you're being shown this vision by an angel.

You're being given a sneak peek into eternity. You're seeing things that are true from the past, things that are true now, things that will be true in the future. And you are being amazed again. You're being encouraged again as God's love is put on display. You're being reminded that Jesus is victorious. You're being encouraged to stand firm in the trials that are coming.

And this amazing encounter is about to finish. It's about to come to an end. Now, last week, sorry, we looked at essentially the finale, if you like, of the book of Revelation.

There's a lot of pressure when you get to a finale because we have expectations. The finale needs to tie it all together, needs to finish things. And you know when you're reading a book or a series of book or watching a series of TV shows, you've got certain things that you want to be achieved when you get to the finale.

[3 : 12] And if they're not, you kind of feel like it was a letdown or maybe there's another series coming and it's not the last event. And so the finale of Revelation, which isn't just the finale of Revelation, it's the finale of the whole Bible.

It's the finale of all of human history. There's a lot of pressure for this to finish neatly. I mean, I don't know if you guys have seen the last Harry Potter, but it's like it was supposed to pull it all together. Harry was supposed to defeat Voldemort and all that sort of stuff. But, you know, it's obvious that deep down, I can't remember the lady who wrote its name, but she knew that people would be

asking the question, what happens next? And so you've got that really strange, weird scene where we pretend that they've suddenly grown up 30 years, even though they look exactly the same, and they have little kids running around.

And it's a bit of a letdown because the finale didn't achieve its purpose. And so it had to go weird at the end to pretend that it was all finishing neatly. But the good news is, Revelation didn't disappoint us when we got to the episode in chapter 21.

In fact, if anything, it was better than we were hoping for. Even as we looked through Revelation and saw that the victory was won, even when we saw Jesus on the throne, even when we were encouraged that there would be vindication for his people, you couldn't have begun to imagine just how good the picture was going to be when you got to chapter 21.

[4 : 27] This glorious heavenly city comes down and God dwells with his people. There is no more pain. There is no more tears. The shadow of death has been removed.

Sin and Satan and temptation and failure are no longer a part of our experience as God's people. There is a city with no sea and no night. It is perfect in every way.

It is beautiful beyond description, so it requires strange imagery that we looked at last week. It's apparently a cube city with jewels and pearls for gates and we know that those are images trying to explain to us that it is immeasurably beautiful, that it is immeasurably large, that there is room for all those who would come in and most importantly, that when we get there, every injustice will be righted.

Every Christian will be vindicated, washed clean, adopted and perfectly satisfied living in the presence of God.

I mean, you could not have asked for more. God has fixed everything that was wrong and in chapter 22 in these first few verses, the image just keeps rolling out and getting better and better.

[5 : 40] I mean, the big problem with our existence on this earth is death. It's the issue that we struggle with in everything. It's the thing that we try and avoid. It's the thing that we fear. It's the thing that drives us.

And yet, chapter 22 opens with these amazing words to describe the future city that God has prepared. In verse 1, Life is flowing in this new city.

There is no death. Life is flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. And then verse 2, Down the middle of the great street of the city, on each side of the river stood the tree of life. There is no death in this city.

There is only life coming from the great source of life, our Saviour Jesus. There's something really, really clever here that God has done in this image. The word that is used for tree here when it talks about the tree of life is not the word that you would normally use for tree.

It's a word that kind of refers to a dried piece of wood or a bit of wood that's been removed that might be used to build something like a cross. It's the same word that the New Testament uses in other places to describe the tree that Jesus was nailed to.

[6 : 56] If you think back to the Garden of Eden and the apparently perfect picture there, you've got trees, you've got fruit, and you've still got that here, but there's something extra going on with this tree of life.

The tree of life in the eternal city is the cross of Jesus. The source of life, the defeat of death, all flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This future city will be life. Life will flow through it. Night will be removed. And the shadow of what Jesus has achieved will mean that we live forever.

It removes the curse. It deals with the issue. Have a look at verse 3, just this first sentence. Just let it sit for a second. No longer will there be any curse.

In this new city where death is removed, so is every problem that we have faced in our experience, in our existence. If you go right back to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam and Eve get it all wrong, when they reject God and they try and take His place as being in charge, what happens?

[8 : 10] Everything breaks. Friction is introduced. Opposition is introduced. Our relationships become broken and damaged and painful. Our interaction with the creation that we live in becomes difficult and a struggle.

And most importantly, our ability to have an unhindered relationship with the God who made us is removed. And when we get to this city, every part of that curse is dealt with.

Our relationships will be restored. There will no longer be jealousy or spite or unforgiveness or selfishness or hurt. Our struggles in our day-to-day life, that feeling of, I don't want to get up today, I can't be bothered.

None of that. There will only be joy as we fulfill tasks that God will have for us in the new creation. But most importantly, we finally get to have access to God.

It says in verse 3, There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and His servants will serve Him. And this bit, really important, they will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads.

[9 : 25] The first thing that Adam and Eve did in Genesis when they realized they'd done the wrong thing was they hid from God's presence. They feared to be in God's presence.

There was shame. They knew they'd done the wrong thing. But the reality was God in His perfection became dangerous to sinful people like Adam and Eve. And that's ultimately why He removed them from the garden and their relationship was given distance so that they would not be destroyed.

So there was a chance of restoration. And we read this incredible thing in Exodus chapter 33 when Moses is leading God's people. And Moses is like the guy.

He's got like special, you know, direct access to God. And he cries out and he says to God, let me see your glory. So show me your glory. And God's response is, I will hide you and walk past you and give you just a sneak peek of my back because if you see my face you will die.

Now remember, Moses is like the top of the top of God's people at this point. There is no one better. There is no one more chosen. Yet for him to see God's face would mean being destroyed because God is that holy and that perfect and even Moses has no right to stand face to face with the God of heaven.

[10 : 47] And yet, in the finale, in the end, those who bear the name of Jesus will see God face to face.

you will have access to the one who spoke the earth into being. I mean, it's hard for us to comprehend just how different this city, this future eternal existence is going to be because our lives are so tainted by sin and rebellion and this will be perfect.

This will be absolutely perfect. Heaven will be the fulfillment of every good thing that God has promised, every blessing that has been held back, every curse removed, every relationship restored and we will get to see God face to face.

No more wondering what he thinks. No more wondering what he's like. No more wondering if he loves us. We will have direct access to our great heavenly father.

And we are told that his servants will reign with him forever and ever. no more being on the sideline, no more missing out, no more being oppressed because we follow a saviour that is mocked and ridiculed.

[12 : 06] We will be vindicated. We will reign with him. We will celebrate and share in his victory. The glory of this finale of this image is almost overwhelming.

If you just reflect on it a little bit, if you just grab one issue that is in your life right now, it is resolved here. The thing that is causing you the most pain and grief in your life right now, it is resolved here. And not just made okay. It is perfectly restored. Restored. Whether that is physical, emotional, perfectly restored.

But now, the vision is over. John is still in exile on the island of Patmos.

We still have to go to work or school tomorrow or do our normal day-to-day lives. And suddenly, those circumstances come screaming back into focus. Now that the vision is over, it might feel a little bit like you've just arrived home from holiday.

[13 : 19] The angel gives John a little sign off. These words are trustworthy and true. He says, you can trust these because Jesus is the one who sent me with this message. But then you've got to ask the question, what do we do with this vision?

Now that our day-to-day experience comes back in and we're not just sitting here drunk on the excitement of how fantastic it's going to be, what do we do with this book? What do we do tomorrow as we struggle?

What do we do the next day as we struggle? What's the point of all of this? One of the interesting things I find in my role is that I kind of live in between adults and kids in my role here at church.

So I get to kind of hang out with all the different age groups and get to talk about Jesus with them and I love the different ways that we express what we understand from the Bible.

And so if I was to talk with many of you about the book of Revelation, we would find it quite difficult to sort of summarize it, to bring it down into a neat little package. There's so much in there, so many images and we want to kind of make sure we've ticked all the boxes and included everything.

[14:23] And so we might be a little bit nervous about a task like that but I love that if I went to kids church next door, they could probably give me a one-word answer and that would be exactly correct. They might not know they were correct, they might just be reaching for the answer that they know is probably correct but they would probably be right.

They know that when you get asked a question by somebody at church, the answer is probably Jesus. If not, it's Bible but Jesus is always good to start with. But I pray they never grow out of that. I pray that we never grow out of that because that is the point, that is the summary. For 13 weeks the main character has been Jesus.

For every chapter in scripture the main character has been Jesus and in this final city, this eternal future, the main character is still Jesus. I don't know if you remember chapter 1, John is given this vision of Jesus amongst his churches, blazing like fire with a sword out of his mouth, speaking words like a rushing wind, this picture of a glorious Jesus.

In chapters 4 and 5 the Lamb Jesus is on the throne and all of the heavenly hosts gather round, bow down and worship him, crying out holy, holy, holy is the Lamb who was slain.

[15:44] In chapter 12 it's Jesus who is exalted to the throne having defeated Satan and cast him out of heaven. In chapter 19 it's Jesus who arrives on the white horse as the victorious king.

And here in chapters 21 and 22 it's the throne of God and the Lamb Jesus who is in the city. It is his presence, it is his blood that has washed us clean and given us access to this great city.

It is all about Jesus. And just to make sure that we don't miss this point, Jesus interrupts John reflecting on this great vision that he's just seen. Verse 7 Behold I am coming soon.

It's not the angel talking anymore, it's not the angel pointing, Jesus' voice cuts through and says I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.

It's all about Jesus. Now there's a really strange little verse that comes up here which I think is there for our encouragement. I don't know if you noticed it when Jase was reading it out but this is the end.

[16:53] This is like victorious, this is no more Satan, this is no more issue, no more sin, this is everything should be fantastic but this is the Harry Potter as a dad moment in the finale.

Have a look at verse 8. I John am the one who heard and saw these things. I John am the one who saw this incredible vision of Jesus and so what does he do?

And when I had heard and seen them I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing me. It's all about Jesus.

It's not about the angel but John the disciple. The first thing he does having seen this glorious victorious picture of Jesus is bow down to an angel.

The angel corrects him. He said to me, do not do it. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book worship God. That's the point.

[17:59] It's all about Jesus. It's showing us who he is. It's showing us his infinite worth, his unique worth that he alone is to be worshipped. But I think this little strange John episode, remember this is the end.

It should be all neat. This should be the point where John gets it, where it clicks and it makes sense and he worships Jesus but he fails spectacularly. I believe that Jesus includes this little bit for us so that we might understand a little bit of what it's like to live between seeing this vision and fully experiencing it when he comes back.

Having just heard the words, I'm coming soon, John is trying to deal with the hope and his reality and he fails. And so often great hope and great encouragement like this are followed by temptation and failure, are followed by distraction.

If you think of the disciple Peter when Jesus is in Gethsemane, he is the first one to jump to Jesus' defence, showing his colours, how committed he is, he pulls his sword, but just moments later he denies Jesus three times.

I can think in my own life of times where I have gotten up to speak of the incredible grace of God, which in no way depends on anything that I could or couldn't do and which is an open invitation for

absolutely anybody to come to Jesus, and literally moments later be standing chatting to somebody and internally judging the things that I'm hearing.

[19 : 37] It is a difficult reality for us that we are still in the battle. As glorious as our hope is, we are still in the battle and there is encouragement here. This vision was given to John not because of who John is, he's just like us, but because our God is gracious and that same grace forgives John in this moment, sets him back on his feet and points him in the right direction, worship Jesus.

And as we struggle and fail in our lives, the same grace that called us and showed us Jesus will forgive us and pick us up and strengthen us to keep going. Worship him alone.

That's what it means to keep the words of this prophecy. It means you see Jesus as one who is worthy of your worship, who is worthy of your allegiance, who is worthy of your commitment, who is worthy of your service, who is worthy of your whole life.

That's what it's all about. This vision isn't necessarily a specific description of how it's going to happen and what it's going to look like. the end in revelation is a person.

It's Jesus. When we get to the end, we will see him fully. That's what will make it the end. Jesus says, I'm coming soon, so worship me alone.

[21 : 02] He says again, verse 12, behold, I am coming soon. Three times he makes it clear, I am coming soon. So get excited. Revelation coming to an end is not the end of your holidays.

It's Christmas Eve. The point is to tell you that something amazing is just around the corner. You know that feeling on Christmas Eve.

It happens here when we gather for church, the 11pm service. Little plug, Christmas Eve 11pm is really exciting because you know that if church runs long enough, it's Christmas Day and you can go home and open a present. I remember as a kid wanting to pester my parents, come on, can I open one, can I open two, can I open three, can I just open a couple of presents the day before. Christmas Eve is all about the anticipation and the excitement and the expectation of what is to come. Jesus says in verse 12, behold, I am coming soon.

He's whetting our appetite. my reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

[22 : 12] Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. If you are trusting Jesus, revelation should be making you excited because Jesus is coming soon.

and when he shows up, everything that we have seen in these last two chapters comes with him. Perfection, complete forgiveness, access to our heavenly father face to face.

I'm coming soon so get excited. excited. I want to say that if the vision that we have been given in these chapters is not something that's appealing to you, is not something that's exciting, I want to challenge you to look again.

I understand it's imagery, it's prophecy, it's not just plain, but I want to challenge you that if it's not exciting, you need to look again. If you're being distracted by the angels in your life like John was or if you're busy bowing down to comfort or security or a career or whatever else, it just means you need to look again.

You need to look at Jesus. You need to understand who he is and how worthy he is and how good he is and how satisfying he is and you need to start getting excited for what is to come.

[23 : 39] The whole Christian life is a response to Jesus. That's why this book is such an incredible gift. That's why this is the way it finishes. Because then we will see him fully and in the light of that complete revelation we will be released to live the lives that we were made to live.

But even now in the battle we need to look again at Jesus. He is the motivation for us to live the Christian life. The incredible love and grace and forgiveness that he has shown us are motivation when we're struggling.

But more than that he is the power for you to live the Christian life. He is the power that forgives you by his blood so that you can be washed clean so that you can have access to the tree of life.

His spirit at work in you is the strength to convict you and grow your heart to love him as he deserves. All of being a Christian is about fixing your eyes on Jesus and having your heart respond to him.

It has nothing to do with how strong you are, how disciplined you are, how good you are. It's all about him. There's this amazing couple of verses there in verse 17.

[24 : 55] The spirit and the bride say come. Having gotten this vision of Jesus, even the Holy Spirit says come. The Holy Spirit is getting excited.

He anticipates the glorious city. And let him who hears say come. Let anyone who hears these words and begins to see Jesus in his glory say come because it's good news.

Whoever is thirsty, let him come. And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Jesus says I am coming soon and he means it.

But in his incredible grace and sovereignty, that little gap that he has given us between the vision and his arrival is an invitation for whoever wishes.

Whoever wants to be in that city can come. Whoever wants to know forgiveness and joy and peace and perfection and satisfaction can come and take the free gift of the water of life.

[26 : 05] love. We've got to understand the hope that we have is an open offer to anyone who would come. It's not a hope to be apologized for.

When we can speak of the kind of perfection that is in these pages, don't be embarrassed about it. Every issue that anyone on this earth is dealing with right now will only be fully and finally dealt with in heaven.

We can tell people about that. We can point them to the solution in Jesus. There is nothing to be sorry for or shy about. Jesus says, I am coming soon.

And with him comes his kingdom, this perfect creation, and a perfect relationship with God. If you're struggling now, hear the words of Jesus, I'm coming soon.

If you're going great and life is fantastic, hear the words of Jesus, I'm coming soon and with me comes something better. If right now you're feeling pretty apathetic, hear the words of Jesus.

[27 : 29] Jesus says, I'm coming soon. Jesus says, he's coming soon.

Three times. He means it. Are you ready for when he comes? Are you excited for when he comes? Jesus says, I'm coming soon. Are you living now in light of this image of Jesus? In light of the king, the risen one, the saviour?

Are you living now in anticipation of perfection? Jesus says, I'm coming soon. Amen.
Come, Lord Jesus.