

Jesus: Perfection

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Revelation chapter 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

He said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

[1 : 19] He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

This is the second death. One of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and said to me, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

[2 : 31] There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide.

He measured the city with the rod, and found it to be twelve thousand stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

He measured its wall, and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third calcindony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysiptase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

[3 : 56] The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.

The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the

Lamb's Book of Life.

And continuing on. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city.

[5 : 10] On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night, they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

The angel said to me, These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.

Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book. I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.

[6 : 15] And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, Do not do it.

I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with all who keep the words of this book. Worship God. And then he told me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.

Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong. Let him who is vile continue to be vile. Let him who does right continue to do right. And let him who is holy continue to be holy.

Behold, I am coming soon. 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.

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. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts.

[7 : 27] The sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.

I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come. And whoever is thirsty, let him come.

And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.

[8 : 35] Amen. Will you join with me in prayer? Gracious Lord and Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and that wonderful promise that brings the future into the present.

We pray that by your spirit, you might enliven that word in our hearts once again. Amen. Give us hope that we might put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to obey him.

We pray, Father, that your kingdom might come this morning as we respond to that word. And we pray these things, Father, so that you might be glorified in your son.

And in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. We have been travelling through the whole of the Bible in the last few weeks and we are close to the end of our journey.

You will recall that we have been looking at the story of the Bible, which we have argued is the story of the kingdom of God.

[9 : 50] And if you have been with us, it has been a great story with great ideas. But if that is all it is, I want to suggest to us this morning that it is completely irrelevant to us and to the world.

For if the Bible is simply a story, it would stand, as it were, against other stories. It is not real.

But hopefully, as we read from the Bible, we have seen that it claims to be more than just a story. It claims to be real. It claims to be the history of God's dealing with the human race in time and space. So if you were living in Ur 5,000 years ago, you would have met Abraham. You would have heard of his encounter with God and the promises that were made to him.

The Bible is more than just a series of ideas. It is not just a fairy tale. But I also want to say that the Bible is more than just history. For if the Bible is simply history, it is, again, just as irrelevant to us.

[11:15] It is irrelevant for most of us that Victoria was the Queen of England some time ago. It was relevant, perhaps, to her generation. But to us now, today, in Australia, in Sydney, hundreds of years later.

The story of the Bible is history. In other words, it is real. It happened in time and space. But it is history that has a future.

It extends into the future. And therefore, it is relevant to us and the world. Even those who might not be followers of Jesus.

Unless it has a future, let me reiterate that point, it has no relevance. But because it has a future, it is deeply relevant to all of us.

I suggested in the first week that as we approach the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, there are four questions that we can ask.

[12:20] What is the story so far? So it is an unfolding story, and we need to see it in its context. We've read a part of the story, and we need to ask ourselves, well, what is this particular part about?

But it's more than just description. It tells us something about God and us and the world and the future. And so we need to ask that question.

What does this, in the context of the unfolding story, tell us about God and us and the universe?

And lastly, the question is, well, what difference does Jesus make to what we've read?

Well, the first question, I'll apply the same methodology to Revelation 21 and 22. Well, the story so far, what is the story so far? What is the story of the kingdom? I like to characterize it as a story of tension.

It is a story of conflict. For the world we live in is not right. We, deep inside of us, yearn to have a better world.

[13:30] We want the future to be better than today. We yearn for a world where there is no tears, no pain, no mourning, no death. The Bible explains that the reason why we live in this world of tension is because at the very beginning of the history of the human race, we decided that God is irrelevant, that we would do a better job running this world and our lives than him, that we would do a better job being the one who decides what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong.

And early on in the history of God's dealing with the human race, we read that God has promised that he would reverse that, that he would reverse the cursedness, the world of tension that we live in, and that he would do it through one man and his family.

And as we trace through the story of the Bible and the working out of that promise, we see that the climax of this story is again in one man, a carpenter from Galilee.

That the whole of human history and his resolution of the tensions that we feel focus on this one man and his execution as a criminal and ultimately his victory over death.

And yet I think the question that is raised through the story, as we read the story, even now as we stand, is it true?

[15:21] For we still live in a world of tension. If God has made a promise that he would fix the world, that he would reverse the effect of human rebellion and sin and curse and death, why do we still live in a world of pain, of tears, of death?

And if you experience it, you might hear that this is the question that the rest of the world asks. You claim that there is a God who has promised all these things, but where is he?

Does he really care? You know, that is one of the big questions against Christianity and the claims of the Bible. If there were a God and he's powerful and he's loving, why does suffering exist in this world?

Does he really care? How is he going to act to fix the world? Even now, we experience that tension, that world of evil and tragedy, in a world that seems God is uninvolved.

And therefore, increasingly, us who are worshippers of this God in the name of Jesus become irrelevant. That our voice disappears because of the overwhelming, I guess, nature of those questions.

[16:50] The same question, where is God in all this, in this world of tension, if he's promised to rectify it all? I think this is the story of the Bible so far.

And this is the point at which we have come to. And we come to this episode in Revelation 21 and 22. And unfortunately, we won't have time to look at every single detail.

It is a fascinating picture and a very encouraging one. But I'll just draw out some salient points from these two chapters. Well, what is this particular episode about? It is clearly a picture of the kingdom of God.

For what we are shown in, in this episode, is the throne room of God. We're taken to the very seat of God. What do we see in this picture, in the kingdom of God?

We see God and his anointed on the throne. Okay, this is a world, the world in the first century is no different to our world today.

[18:01] It is a world of chaos, of sickness and evil. What was shown to John, who wrote this book, is that God was and is still king.

Despite of everything that we experience and that is apparent to us. Well, what is this king doing in this world of chaos and suffering?

Chapter 21, verse 5. He's the pronouncement from the throne. And this is what he says, I am making everything new.

In the sovereignty of this God, what he is doing is a recreation of the world. Everything is being made new, completely new.

And as part of that process, he will destroy all the corruption and evil of the old world. And this is why in chapter 21, verse 8, the new world is one that is without evil or anyone who does evil.

[19:10] There is no possibility in a new world that it would be corrupt again. He's a difference to the garden. There is possibility in a garden that there would be a fall.

In this new world, in this picture of the new world, there is no possibility. The new world is described, in verse 2, as a city and as a bride.

His picture language, of course, he's seeking to capture something of the experience of this new world. It is a beautiful bride, a pure, adorned for her wedding.

It is a magnificent, glorious city. A city not just made of bricks and mortar, but of gold and pearls.

But of course, a city is more than just brick and mortar.

What makes Chastwood a great city to live in, if you live in Chastwood or elsewhere, is not because of the building, hopefully, but because of the people.

[20:20] A city is ultimately a network of relationship. Here is God making a new city, in other words, a new human race, for his new world.

A magnificent, glorious people. Pure. A don for her husband. But the most significant thing, I think, of this picture of the city, isn't what is there, we are told, but what isn't there.

I don't know if you notice the curious thing. There is no evil. Yes, that is true. But in verse 22, did you notice what else is in there? Have a look.

There is no temple. That's right. Now, that might not surprise you, but I think for a first century Jew, it would be very surprising indeed to hear that the new Jerusalem has no temple.

It would be like me saying, I've seen a new Sydney, in the new heavens and the new earth, and it is glorious. It is much better than the old Sydney, except there is no harbour.

[21:34] And there is no opera house, and there's no harbour bridge. And you think, what is Sydney without the harbour? It would just be Melbourne.

Melbourne. And what is so great about that? See, each city in our world have their own distinctive identification.

If I were to mention the Big Ben, you would know which city I'm talking about, or the Eiffel Tower. If I were to mention the temple of God, you would think Jerusalem.

The temple is what makes Jerusalem the city of God. For the temple symbolises the very presence of God. And yet, in this new Jerusalem, there is no temple.

And we are told why. Because there is no need for a temple in a new Jerusalem. In a new Jerusalem, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are his temple.

[22:44] For the Lord will be present with his people. Again, I want to take you through the story of the Bible so far. Go back a little bit to Exodus 19, you remember, as part of our series.

Exodus 19, Israel was being prepared to meet God face to face on Mount Sinai. There was lightning and thunder. A terrifying picture.

And what they were told is that don't come near. If anyone were to even touch the mountain, he or she or it must be put to death.

No one can come near into the presence of God. Even in Israel itself, there was the temple. But people were excluded. There were only a select few who could come inside the temple.

And even when that were to happen, there has to be a massacre. A slaughter of animals and blood were to be spilled. But here is different.

[23 : 49] In a city of God, where all of the people of God is present and God is in the midst of her, people are to be in fellowship with God face to face.

It reminds us, of course, of Eden and Genesis 1. Of Adam and Eve walking, as it were, side by side, talking face to face with God.

Here it is. Again, the future of the kingdom of God. Where all of us, not excluded, but in the presence of God, never with the possibility of being excluded again.

Of course, what stands between Exodus 19 and the life Israel and Revelation 21 and 22 is Jesus. We know that. Jesus is the one who has made the difference. Do you remember, as we go towards Easter, you probably hear this passage again, Mark 15, at Jesus' death, when he finally breathed his last breath, one of the things that happened was this enormous curtain in the temple was torn in half.

[25 : 12] Not so much that people now have access to God, but rather God come into the midst of sinful people. Hebrews 10, Jesus is the high priest who has offered up the sacrifice of his own life once and for all time to give us access to the throne room of God.

There has been a massacre. There has been a slaughter and a spilling of blood. And it is God himself who has died in order to bring us into his presence forever.

Never to be excluded. And as a result, chapter 24, verse, sorry, 21, verse 4, there will be no more tears, no more mourning, no crying, no pain.

There is rather, in contrast, a life in abundance. Life in this new world, in the kingdom of God, is pictured as a river.

to those who are thirsty, verse 6, God has promised the water of life without cost. The image is expanded in chapter 22.

[26 : 33] He's a river. Of course, if you're living in the Middle East, in a desert, you can really feel the force of that image. Water represents life.

No water, no life. Here it is, life in abundance. The people of God has access to the true of life, which is set on either side of the river, bearing 12 crops.

In other words, every month, every year, there is a crop of fruit from the tree of life. In other words, there's life forever. The river flows through the city.

In other words, everyone in the city has access to the tree of life. There is no curse, verse 3. The lamb has overcome the curse.

Those whose name are written in his book can come and feast on the tree of life forever. This is the picture of the kingdom, of God's rule, of life in abundance.

[27 : 42] His people resting in safety. What the whole of history and the story of the Bible has been looking forward to and now come to completion, the reality.

And what will God's people do in this place, in God's kingdom, in His presence? Chapter 22, verse 3.

They do what they were created to do. They worship Him. They serve Him. And in doing so, verse 5, they reign with Him.

It is true to say that heaven, the kingdom of God, is going to be one long church service. as it should be.

In our fallenness, when we think of the kingdom, when we think of the future, we tend to think of us in it.

[28 : 47] That we are the center of this kingdom. That we are the center of our future. I remember having a conversation with my kids in the car, and I explained to them what heaven would be like, and they were really quite upset.

One of them, in fact, said, I don't want to be there. Part of the reason is that somebody has told them they thought that the kingdom of God in the future would be like Lunar Park, endless rides.

In our sinfulness, we have sort of deconstructed and reconstructed kingdom in our image. No wonder the idea of one long church service is so unappealing.

The kingdom, the future, rather, is laid out for God, and us in the proper place, worshipping God, enjoying him forever.

He is the center of the future. He is Revelation 21 and 22. The story so far, what this episode, but what does this tell us about God and us and the universe and the times?

[30 : 00] Well, one of the realities which the Bible keeps coming back to is the fact that there is the kingdom of God and Jesus is the king, that he is Lord.

That Jesus is Lord is more than just an idea. It is real. It has happened in time and space. when Jesus rose from the dead, he was crowned the king of the world.

And that is what is in store for the future. In other words, there is a future. There is a future in this world. There is a future for all of us. The future is not hopeless.

I read during the week a quote from Augustine, one of the great theologians of our church in the past. He says, there, there, in the future, we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?

[31 : 18] A kingdom of rest, of the presence of God, of love, of worship. There is a future.

It is a wonderful future. Again, I've been reading a little bit about future this week and it occurred to me how important it is to the present.

Unless you have a future, you don't have any meaning in the present. Another word for meaning is a point.

When you're reading a story, when you're watching a movie, there's an allusion to movie, when you're watching a movie or reading a story, it's all very interesting but it means nothing unless there is a point, there is a destination, there is an end.

This is why it's actually quite difficult if you're in the middle of a story to know what the story is really about. It's just a meandering, a putting together of facts.

[32 : 27] Unless there is a destination, unless there is a point, unless there is an end point, everything that you experience in the middle of the story doesn't make sense.

This is why it's so important when God deals with the human race, that he shows us a picture of the destination. For the destination makes sense of everything that we experience now.

If you know the end, you know what everything that you see and experience and understand and heard is going towards. The full picture, as Deb has alluded to, or mentioned, has been shown to us.

It makes sense of everything. But we have to be careful, for the present is not the future.

We read of this kingdom of God, of this river of life, of life in abundance, of an experience that is without tears and pain and mourning and death.

[33 : 37] And we read that Jesus is Lord. Is Jesus Lord in the present? Yes, he is Lord. And we sort of jump from there into the future and we confuse the two.

And when we do, I think what happens is we become terribly disappointed. You know, if we are in the kingdom and Jesus is Lord, surely our experience as the people of God should be won without pain or tears or mourning or sickness or retrenchment or divorce.

There should be no sin. we must not confuse the future with the present for the future is not yet.

The future is future, the present is present.

The future has broken in to the present. Yes, we experience the future in a very real way by faith, but it is veiled just like the cross.

when you look at the cross of Christ, you see the glory of God, you see the Son of God being crowned as the King of the world. But what do you see?

[34 : 49] You see a naked Jewish man being hung on an instrument of torture by the Romans being executed. But when you have the eyes of faith, you will see that it is there that the Lamb is redeeming the world.

He is washing us clean by that very very act. The present is the present. The future is the future.

We do experience the future but in a real way by faith.

The fullness of the future is still to come. Now is the time of now and not yet. We must not confuse the truth. What does it mean for us?

Yes, there is a future. It makes sense of the present. The present is now. What is happening now? Well, the first thing that we see is, I suppose, the sobering thought that some will not have a future with Jesus.

Chapter 20, 21, verse 8. There will be some who will be shut out, excluded. Their destiny, according to this picture of the future, is the second death.

[36 : 05] having a future that is coming and imminent carries a warning. Chapter 22, verses 7 to 10. Jesus says he's coming.

It has present implication, for the present is a moment of opportunity not to be missed. I'm doing some study at the moment.

There is a future. It's the first of April. One of my papers is due. The opportunity to get the paper done and not fail the course, I have to say, is dwindling and getting smaller and smaller by the minute.

Every day that passes, that window of opportunity gets smaller. It is with Jesus. Jesus is Lord. He will come back to establish the kingdom of God.

The opportunity to be included as that part of their kingdom is getting smaller and smaller as the day continues. Once he comes, that opportunity is gone.

[37 : 21] And so there is an invitation in verse 17 of chapter 22. Take the opportunity while it is still available to you.

If you are one who does not know of Jesus, who has no hope of this future, what the kingdom of God is taking you and I to, is the conclusion that there is an opportunity now.

And that opportunity has to be taken while it is still there. Take the opportunity to receive salvation. There might be people in your life that you care about, that you might want to avail that opportunity to.

Invite them to come into the kingdom, not to come to church per se, but invite them into a relationship with Jesus. Invite them to be blessed by God.

You know, one of the things that we've been saying in the story of the kingdom is that God has promised blessing to the world. You recall that. Well, where's the blessing in this?

[38 : 45] Revelation chapter 1 verse 3. Revelation, the point of writing Revelation is so that we might be blessed. We might be blessed by reading this word, this picture of the future.

This is the time of blessing. What does it mean to be blessed by God? What does it mean when you read this picture of the kingdom? It's akin to me making a very important piece of warning.

If I were to say to you, news has come to me that there is a bomb in the building. It's an important piece of news.

And there are two choices that you have. You can either heed that news and start running, or you can ignore that news. Here's an impending danger. If you listen to the warning, you will be blessed because you will escape the explosion and live.

Here's a picture of the future kingdom that is coming. And there are two responses to it. You can either believe that word of the warning and flee the coming wrath and hold on to Jesus for salvation, or you can ignore it.

[40 : 05] And if you heed that word, you will be blessed. Now is the time for blessing. blessing means heeding that word, believing what the gospel says.

The second thing now I want to mention is that Jesus is Lord. This book, along with the rest of the Bible, have been written to the people of God.

And one of the things that you will see in the history of the people of God is that consistently they are losers. If you're not a Christian, truth in advertising, you become a Christian, you'll be a loser. Consistently, they look like they're defeated. The world is just too strong. The enemies of God are just too clever for us. And we get smashed every time.

And if you're a Christian, I wonder whether you feel that all the time. You sort of win a battle, but you feel like you're losing the war all the time. What this picture of the future kingdom shows us is that although we live like people who seem defeated, if Jesus is Lord, as he's demonstrated at the resurrection, then the future belongs to him, despite of all that is apparent to us.

[41 : 34] And if the future belongs to him, it belongs to those of us who belong to him. You remember what Jesus says in Matthew on the Sermon on Mount, blessed are the poor.

The world does not look like they belong to the poor. The world belongs to the rich, the powerful, the clever, the articulate. But the Bible shows us clearly that if Jesus is Lord, it belongs to those who belong to him.

Even though at this time we look like the poor, people, we look like people who are grieving. For in reality we are kings and priests. The third point I will make in terms of the implication for us is now and not yet.

We still experience a world of pain and suffering. We still experience sin. In Revelation 21, 22, it says that the future kingdom of God belongs to those who are pure.

And for those of us on this side of heaven, we yearn to be pure. None of us are pure. When I look at myself, when I look at you, I don't see people who are pure.

[42 : 51] I experience my own sin. But the reality of who we are will become apparent at that time. Now is the time of now and not yet.

When Jesus return, you and I will be transformed into his likeness. And at that time, we will be welcomed into the city because we have been purified by the blood of Jesus.

In the meantime, we've grown along with the rest of creation for the coming kingdom. Lastly, where is the kingdom to be seen now?

Where is the kingdom visible? If it is veiled, where can we see the kingdom? I want to suggest that in the kingdom, what will be the people doing?

So what will we be doing? We'll be worshipping God. We'll be serving him. We'll be ruling with God. And that is exactly where we see the kingdom of God at work at this point in time.

[43 : 59] We see the kingdom most visible when the people of God are worshipping God, serving him. And that is what we have come together to do, is it not? We have come together in the name of Christ to sing praises to God and to love one another.

This is the reality of the kingdom now. Ruling the world, the kingdom of God, isn't talking about being in charge.

We might not have any political power, but that's irrelevant. We participate in the rule of King Jesus by worshipping him, by proclaiming his kingship, by deferring our needs for the sake of others so that they might know Christ.

When we do that, we experience the kingdom. When we do that, the kingdom becomes visible. The story of the Bible is the story of the kingdom.

It is more than just a bunch of good ideas. It is more than just history, although it did happen. It is history with a trajectory, with a pathway towards the future.

[45 : 21] It is a certain thing. Jesus is the Lord. He is Lord now. He will come again and the kingdom will be visible at that time.

In the meantime, he is still Lord. We are to proclaim him as Lord. We are to live as people of the kingdom with him as the Lord.

Let me encourage you with those words. Will you join me in prayer? Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus is the Lord of the world. Thank you that you have given us a hope, a word of what the future holds and what reality is now.

We pray, Father, that we might live in light of that hope, seeing all of our life in the context of that coming kingdom, the priorities, the meaning, the relationships.

We pray, Father, that in our priorities, in our lives, in our proclamation, in our worship, that the world and us might see clearly that Jesus is Lord and in doing so, all glory might go to him.

[46 : 36] And we pray this for his sake. And we pray along with John, come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.