

The Dwelling of God with Man

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to Revelation chapter 21. We're going to look at that first passage from the beginning to verse 8.

And just by way of a text, we could perhaps look at verse 5. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

If you go through the book of Revelation, as we well know, it is full of conflict and turmoil. The kind of conflict which is described to us that takes place on this earth in this life.

But that conflict will come to an end. And it has done in verse 21. The decks have been cleared. All the opposition to God and his purpose has been taken away and destroyed.

And now it's time for God to introduce, to unveil his final plan. Which we call commonly heaven.

[1 : 41] We call it that because the Bible calls it that. It's a somewhat confusing and misunderstood concept. And yet, it is a reality nonetheless.

Not just made clear to us here at the end of Revelation, but made clear to us all the way through the Bible. Heaven is not simply a place.

It is a place. And we'll look at what is described here in the first part of chapter 21 in a few moments. But we mustn't just think of heaven as a place.

The Bible describes it, first of all, as where Christ is. That's what makes heaven, heaven.

If it wasn't that God dwelt in heaven and where Jesus is, it wouldn't be heaven. It may be a very wonderful place. God is capable of making a thousand wonderful places.

[2 : 51] But what makes heaven, heaven, is that Christ himself is there. That's why Paul said, to be with Christ is better by far.

And that's why Jesus himself said, I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, there you may be also.

So that's the essence of heaven. It is to be with Jesus Christ. It's also described in the Bible as better by far.

And that's because it is a different dimension to this world. It is a place which is superior to this world.

And that's because it is a different dimension altogether. But yet, if we want a description of heaven as a place, the best thing that we could do is to read the words of this and the next chapter, because that's exactly what God wants us to think about when he wants us to think about heaven.

[4 : 05] Once again, what we have in this chapter is symbolic. In other words, not everything in these chapters would we expect to see in reality, as they're described here.

But they help us to understand what heaven actually is. You see, it's too grand for us. It's too otherworldly for our limited and our restrained minds and our understanding to comprehend in this life.

And therefore, God describes it in words that are symbolic. Now, how these chapters are set out, we may want to divide this description into three.

The first part is between 1 and verse 8, which is the part I'd like us to think about this evening. And the message of this part is simply this.

God's dwelling place is with man. And of course, with man, I mean, the Bible means with humankind. God's dwelling place is with humankind.

[5 : 22] The second message in this passage is that the former things, the miseries and the pain and the heartaches of this world, are passed away.

That's what we're told in these verses. So we're concentrating. God wants us to concentrate on heaven as it compares with this life.

Not what we enjoy in this life. There are many things in this world that God has given us to enjoy.

But the Bible promises that where we enjoy God's goodness in this world, it doesn't compare with what there will be in perfection in the next world because it will be a perfect world.

You know as well as I do, the problem with this world is that every good thing comes to an end. It does. That's true.

[6 : 29] Whatever we enjoy in this world, and I mean the proper things that we enjoy in this world, they always come to an end. They always run out. But what God promises in the next world that he is creating for his people so that his dwelling will be amongst them is that the former limitations and imperfections of this world, the defects and the disappointments of this world, will be passed away.

They will have gone so that there will be unbroken enjoyment of God's goodness in the next world. And that's why the psalmist, he promises that at your right hand are pleasures evermore in the presence of God.

So we ain't seen nothing yet. And I mean that truly. I'm not being trivial. We haven't seen anything yet. But the Apostle Paul puts it this way. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him.

That's the promise of the gospel. And it's God's promise. And that's why I believe it tonight. I haven't seen it. I haven't tasted it.

I haven't... I was going to say I haven't experienced it, but that's actually not true. Heaven can be tasted in this world. But what I mean is, of course, that when I look at the description here of the ultimate place that God is preparing for his people, then, of course, none of us have ever seen that.

[8 : 11] But we believe it nonetheless because faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Faith is taking God at his word, and that's why I believe in heaven tonight.

As a reality, just as real as this world, just as I can reach out my hand and touch the things around me and know that they are real, I can see them, I can see you, I can see this building and the lights and the windows.

They are reality because they are there. So I believe that there will be a future reality that God is right now preparing for those who love him and those who are forgiven from their sin.

That's the simple message of the gospel. That's the promise. We either believe it or we don't this evening. I believe in heaven because I believe in the reality around me.

But for me, the reality around me is not a random series of events. You and I are not here by chance or luck or a process of mindless evolution.

[9 : 29] Behind this world, there stands a creator. I believe that the reality around us that we can feel and touch and see around us is a created reality.

In other words, the world in which you and I live is there for a purpose. It's there for a reason. It's there because God willed it and wanted it to be there and it remains to this day because God still wants it to be there even in its fallen form.

And so to me, that same God who is capable of producing and creating out of nothing all the complexity and the marvel and the wonder of the universe which humankind still has not grasped is capable equally of creating another dimension, another existence, and another reality.

It stands to reason. Have I said anything yet that is not logical? Whether you believe it or not, that's...

I have to leave that with you. That's between you and the Lord. But have I said anything that is not logical? If behind this world and this universe there is a marvelous creator, a creator that goes way beyond our capacity to understand, a supreme being and a personal being that has created you and I to reflect his personality, to be the image of God and to be conscious of his reality and his truth and his existence, is it not possible for that same God to create another universe or to recreate this one?

[11 : 33] That is why I believe in heaven today because I believe in the earth as it truly is. And so, tonight, I want us to look at what is described for us here in this first passage.

I was going to just give a little flavor of the other passages and try and set out what we hope to do, but I see that the time is already going past and we'll do that next time, hopefully.

Let's look at the description then in these opening verses in chapter 21 of how the apostle John, and remember that these words were written from his prison cell in Patmos, way out in the Mediterranean Sea where he was in prison and where God, we believe, showed him this vision of what was to come.

And here is the final part of this vision and what a marvelous vision it is. Here at last, he gets to see something that truly, his breath has been taken away and he has gone through every single emotion under the sun throughout this book.

Every vision that God has showed him, he has been horrified, he's been afraid, he's been uncertain, he's been, he's trembled within himself, and now he is seeing the end.

[12 : 48] The end result, this is what God is aiming at, at the end of time in this world. And it's put like this, then I saw, he says, a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne saying, said, behold, I am making all things new.

And he said, write this down, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Let's try and unpack this symbolic picture that the apostle gets to see in his vision.

First of all, it is a city. And a city, as we've seen before, it is a collection of people, a vast, in some cases, collection of people.

[14 : 06] Not only is it a city, it is Jerusalem and that adds a different complexion to it. This is not just any city in the world, this is Jerusalem. And we're not talking about the Jerusalem geographically that there is today, which is divided and which is the scene of so much conflict and so much turmoil.

We're not talking about that physical Jerusalem that there is today. We're talking about what the Bible teaches about the significance of Jerusalem as it was in the Bible, which is simply this.

It is the place where God's glory was. It was the place that David took over for himself. King David took it over, first of all, and it was the place where his son Solomon, he built the temple.

And in the temple, God revealed his, he came, when Solomon built the temple, God literally came down and his glory filled the most holy place.

And then that was a taste of what God was ultimately aiming at in the process of time. But nonetheless, it is still a city full of people.

[15 : 17] That's what a city is all about. We saw that Babylon in chapter 18 represented the city in all its horror, with all its badness, the bad side of this world, its selfishness, and the way in which humankind takes advantage of each other and tries to gain as much as they can.

They take advantage of the environment and they take advantage of one another and all they want is to make a fast buck for themselves. All of that, Revelation tells us, will be destroyed.

All of man's selfishness, life as we know it, with all its evil, will be destroyed. But we are included in that. There's no point in pointing the finger. No use in pointing the finger to other parts of the world or other people.

We are all included because the Bible tells us that we are sinners. Nonetheless, this is a new city. It's a city and it contains people, lots of people.

As we move on in chapter 21, we're going to be asking the question, is heaven a big place or a small place? Will heaven be a vast place or a tiny place compared to the other place that's described to us at the end of this section?

[16 : 33] Hell, which we also believe is a reality because the Bible makes it clear. The Lord Jesus makes it clear. But the question is, what will be the difference of size between heaven and hell?

Very often, we think of hell as being a vast place compared to heaven. Heaven will only contain the remnant of God's people. That way, it will be just a few people, maybe a few thousand or a few million compared to the vast, billions and billions of billions in hell.

I don't believe that for a moment. I believe that heaven will be a vast place because the gospel will have by then made such an impact in the world.

In fact, they tell me now, I heard this said the other day, that there are now today all over the world as many Christians living today as there have been and every other age in the earth's history put together.

Now, if that's true, then that's a remarkable statistic. But it also tells me that the future of the church is a bright one. The future of the gospel is a bright one. It's a liberating one.

[17 : 46] It means that the gospel is today the power of God to salvation. That's what the apostle Paul calls it. And that's what we believe tonight because many of us tonight, we are living trophies of the grace of God.

How many of us tonight can say, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, and now I see.

That's your personal testimony tonight. That's my personal testimony. It's because of the grace of God. And if God can do it for me, he can do it for others. He can do it for, he's limitless in his power.

I believe tonight in the power of God. And I believe that this city will be vast. Now for many of us, the idea of spending eternity in a vast city is not the kind of thing that we might look forward to in this world because our experience of cities in this world is the very opposite to enjoyment.

You find yourself in the center of London, for example, and I'm quite sure many people who work there and live there, they want to get away as far away as possible. They hate the place. It's a rat race, they call it, because they have to get up every day and they have to take the tube and the bus and it takes maybe over an hour to get through the traffic jams through London.

[19 : 00] There's millions and millions of people, they have to mow their way through all these people to get to work every single day, Monday to Friday and then Saturday they have to go shopping and so on and so forth. So for many of us, a city is a horrific place.

It's a place you want to get away from. You want to, and you say tonight, well, if God's going to create a place, then surely it would be the country where there'd be peace and quiet and tranquility and beautiful scenery and trees and rivers and all the rest of it.

Instead of that, there's a city. But what if, what if it wasn't like that at all? What if? What if God could create a place where you are perfectly, blissfully happy to be with other people because they meant the world to you?

This was your family. And even although you had never met these people in this side of the world, then there's some kind of cognitive capacity going to be given to us that we will know them and love them instantly as our brothers and sisters in the Lord as our fellow worshippers.

What if relationships were totally transformed? Jesus says they will. Jesus tells us that there'll be no marriage in heaven. It's hard for us to figure that out, isn't it?

[20 : 26] It's hard for us to comprehend. He says that they will be like angels who neither marry nor are given in marriage.

So, every one of us, there'll be no special bond between me and my wife. But on the other hand, there will be a special bond between me and everyone and you and everyone.

Now, I don't know how that's possible. I have no idea because I'm like you. I think of a city. My wife was in Lima the other day and it's a vast, some of you have been in some of the city, nine million people.

You're in the middle of the city, you feel you can't get out, you feel as if you're choking with a smog and all the rest of it. But what if it was the opposite? What if you didn't want to be anywhere else?

And what if God's city was, and the country were one and the same thing? What if the more you were there, the more you wanted to be there and you didn't want to be anywhere else because your breath was continuously, 24-7 for all eternity, taken away by the grandeur and the beauty and the bliss and the joy and the perfection of this new dimension that God has created?

[21 : 52] That's the way it is. That's the way I believe it is. So it's a city. It's a perfect city. You will not want to be anywhere else.

I will not want to be anywhere else. I will never get bored. I will never outstay my welcome. I will never get fed up of you. I hope I don't anyway. You will never get fed up of me.

We will never ever get fed up of one another. We won't be looking at our watches trying to figure out what we're going to do next. Get bored. Get fed up. That's not going to happen because somehow or other God is going to, God is right now preparing a dimension, an existence, a creation.

Behold, I make all things new, the former things, all the miseries of this life are passed away, never to be remembered or thought about anymore.

This will be indescribable. Indescribable. And I come back to what I said before. I believe this is not pie in the sky. To me, this is reality because I believe in this God who created me and you for himself.

[23 : 07] And that's what his plan is. And he will not stop until he achieves that plan. Now the dwelling of God is with men, with mankind.

And the source of the city, that's the second thing I want us to think about this evening. It comes down from heaven. Look at what it says. I saw the holy city in New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

We spoke about Jerusalem and what it meant particularly in the Bible as the place, the city, where God himself presenced himself amongst his people.

That's what heaven will be. God amongst his people. The dwelling of God is with humankind. But the source of the city, it comes, notice it comes down from heaven.

You might say, well I thought this was heaven. How can there be a distinction between the city which is heaven and, well again, we're talking symbolism. In other words, what God is telling us here is that heaven is coming down to the renewed earth, the new heaven and the new earth.

[24 : 18] The earth that God is going to recreate, he's going to remodel, he's going to remodel his earth. Do you know how you remodel a house?

You strip it, destroy everything in it. You take it, strip it all the way back to the bricks and then you build it again with what you want and that's what God is going to do.

Strip this whole earth from everything which is corruptible and evil and sinful, everything which is still in this life and he is going to, he is going to recreate a new heaven and a new earth.

And so you may be surprised that heaven is described as coming down from above and not going up. We think of heaven very often as going up to heaven.

I'm not saying that that's not valid but here at the end of time God's purpose is for heaven to come down and that's because it's not about because his plan is not about improving life as we know it.

[25 : 38] God's plan is not about making this world a better place for our children for the ages to come. God's plan is not saving the planet as we know it.

Now don't get me wrong I'm not saying that we should ignore these things. In fact I believe that Christians should be at the forefront of making sure that we make good use and proper responsible use of the environment around us.

I believe our Christian forefathers did that in their refusal to waste as much as our generation wasted. So I'm not saying that we ignore any suggestion that we treat this world with respect.

We believe today that the world belongs to God and because it belongs to God then we must treat the world with respect. However the Bible says that God's ultimate plan is not an improvement of this world because you know as well as I do that with all the education and science and technology and improvements in this world that you and I men and women remain corrupt.

That's the problem. The problem of the human heart is the human heart. I am the problem. You are the problem.

[27 : 04] And here God is saying that he will raise people from the dead and he will take them with renewed glorified indestructible bodies to be with himself and to live in this fantastic community where their gaze and their focus and their eternal attention will be on him and where we will never ever want to be anywhere else.

The source of the city. He's also described as prepared as a bride for her husband. We saw this earlier on when we talked about the greatest marriage of all time in chapter 19 and you remember what we said that right now God is in this world preparing his people for this very moment.

He is working in you. The moment a person comes to faith in Christ not only is your sin forgiven you are adopted into God's family you are reckoned to be righteous in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit comes into your life taking up residence in your heart and he's there for a purpose to fashion you and mold you and change you and to change your way of thinking and to create within you a hatred for everything that is sinful and a greater love for everything which belongs to God.

That's why communion means so much to us isn't it? That's why we want to be there next week why we're looking forward to sitting at the Lord's table because of what Jesus has done for us and what he is doing for us and we must never forget that.

The reason that today we still want to remember his death as never before is because the Holy Spirit creates within us that desire and that hunger and that thirst that eagerness to remember what brings us together.

[29 : 05] We are being prepared tonight as a bride whether you feel it or not whether you're aware of it or not that's God's promise that if you belong to Jesus God is working in you.

But very lastly time has gone I want us to look thirdly at the inhabitants of this city and the inhabitants are described first of all as those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Now we saw that last time that the Lamb's book of life contains the names of those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. He is the Lamb of God that as Roddy Cunningham was talking about last Sunday morning the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and if you belong to Jesus tonight your hope your only hope is in Jesus as your Lamb that takes away the sin of the world and if you belong to the Lamb your name is written in His Lamb's book of life.

That describes your relationship to Him. But these verses also tell us who the inhabitants of the city are not. Verse 8 look at it with me as for the cowardly the faithless the detestable as for murderers the sexually immoral the sorcerers the idolaters and all liars their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

This is the perfect justice of God. This may sound to you like a kind of a medieval description of something that was believed hundreds of years ago and that should be avoided like the plague tonight.

[30 : 49] No! We're talking tonight about the perfect justice of God because God is the perfect judge. And again whatever symbolism is being used here this is the perfect justice of God.

But look at how they are described those who will not be there. You go through that list and you could do two things. You could compare your life with the very worst people who to you are the very worst people in this world.

You could say to yourself I'm not a coward. I'm not detestable. I'm not sexually immoral. I've never slept with another woman. I'm not an idolater.

I've never worshipped another god. I've never I've never murdered anyone. That belongs to a category of people who are far removed and much different from me.

I'm a respectable person. I've done well in this life. I've always treated other people with respect. You could do that and you get nowhere. Or you could look in the mirror honestly and you could ask yourself honestly to what extent does that horrific list apply to me deep down in my heart.

[32 : 23] You may not have murdered anyone physically but Jesus said that if you hate someone you wish that that person wasn't around you have murdered him in your heart.

you may not have cheated on your wife or your husband but if you look to a woman to lust after her look at what I mean in this day and age of internet pornography Jesus says you've already committed adultery with her in your heart.

I'm quite sure that there are no sorcerers here tonight. Quite sure there are very few sorcerers in Stornoway. But what is sorcery? Sorcery is deriving your spiritual experiences from what is not God and God will hold us accountable when we turn to anything else to derive our spiritual experiences from them.

you say I'm not a coward. But let me ask you the question tonight why really have you never pursued your interest in the gospel?

Why really? Is it really because you've studied the Bible and you've come to the conclusion you've built up your evidence on one side for and against and you've come to that reasoned rational conclusion?

[34 : 05] Or is it because the more you read of the Bible the more you know that if this is true then God demands your complete surrender and that scares you?

You're a coward. That's what the Bible calls you. Faithless.

A person who has refused to come to faith in the truth. And I'm asking you tonight not to compare yourself with other people but to see yourself as you really are.

Whitney Houston died yesterday. The news reports were saying today that she said the biggest devil is me.

That's true. But it doesn't just apply to those who have drug problems or drink problems in this world. It applies to all of us. Let's finish by talking about those who will be there.

[35 : 28] And particularly the description that's given in two words in verse number six. The thirsty.

Look at what he says. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. Are you thirsty tonight?

I'm not asking if you have questions. I know that there are doubts and fears and misgivings and questions and all of these have to take their course. But I'm asking you tonight are you thirsty?

Deep down in your heart of hearts. You know that that thirst can only be satisfied in one place and that's God himself who promises that to the thirsty.

He promises you. Jesus said if any man thirst let him come to me and drink. So I'm asking you tonight to go to the only place where there is an answer to your thirst and to come to Jesus who died so that you can be forgiven and so that you will be forever with the Lord in his city.

[36 : 56] Let's pray. Bless Lord your truth to us. We believe in this message.

we believe Lord that you are able to open up hearts and to bring people to yourself. You've done it before and you will do it again.

You will continue to do it until the very last person is brought into your kingdom. Do it amongst us today we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Psalm number works.