

The Garden Recreated

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Preacher: Principal Iver Martin

[0 : 0 0] Well, we've come to the end of this communion weekend, and for those of you who have been able to be here over the course of these days, you'll know that we've been following a theme, a theme that I've called in the garden.

What we've been trying to do is explore, first of all, Genesis 2. We tried to explore some of the features of Genesis 2, and then on Saturday, we went into Genesis 3 and tried to extrapolate some of the teaching in Genesis 3 that helped us to understand how the perfect world that God created was spoiled by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. And of course, as Paul tells us, it was at that moment that sin came into the world and spread throughout the human race and gave rise to all kinds of evil and violence and mistrust and fear and darkness and shame and everything that we know to be bad.

That was not the world that God created. That's the world that was spoiled because we, in Adam and Eve, we chose to disobey. We saw some of the features of Genesis 3, but we saw at the end of that chapter that while God could have destroyed the world, he chose not to.

Rather, there is a note of hope, a glimmer of light at the end of that chapter. And we saw that that pointed forward to the coming of Jesus and his death on the cross, by which he would crush the head of the serpent.

And even though the serpent got to crush his heel, which we believe to be a reference to the cross, nevertheless, the cross was the decisive victory over what the serpent had done.

[2 : 1 0] That's why the cross is everything to a Christian. It's why what lies at the very heart of what I am tonight, and you are if you're a follower of Jesus, it's the cross.

It's not what we do to try to win God's favor. That's of no use whatsoever. But a person who comes to see what Jesus has done on the cross and to receive his punishment as done on our behalf and to come to faith in Jesus, that's what a person who follows Jesus is all about.

That's what lies at the very heart of what we are. And then we saw this morning at our communion service how the temptation, the Matthew 4 passage on the temptation of Jesus Christ, a passage we know so well, it refers to, it is a reenactment, if you like, or a reversal of Adam's disobedience.

And then again, it points towards the cross because the temptation had reference to Jesus in his ministry in preparation for his death on the cross at Calvary.

Now what we're going to do this evening is, if I was going to give a title to this service, it might be fast forward. And I'm not even sure how fast or how far forward we have to go because I don't know when chapter 21 of Revelation is going to take place.

[3 : 5 2] And you don't know either. We don't know when the world will come to an end. The fact is that the Bible is not a collection of books.

It's the story of the world from the beginning to the end. It has a sequence that winds its way from the first human beings to the final outcome.

If you take God out of the picture and try to make sense of the world without God, then there are two vast unknowns. One is the unknown of how and why humanity began.

And then there is the unknown of how it will all end. You take God out of the picture, you have a massive question mark, or I should say you have two massive question marks.

Why are we here? And when is it going to end or how it's all going to end? And so while much of the content of Revelation, I'm sure you've tried to read it and have been as puzzled as I have about much of the content, the symbolism and the visions that John saw, while it is hard to figure out, there are certain features of it that are clear.

[5 : 14] And one of them is that God will bring this present world to an end. And then he will usher in what is described as the new heaven and the new earth.

And so the last two chapters of Revelation are the grand finale in which the whole of the Bible is summed up, in which the story comes to an end, in which the plan of God comes to fruition.

And there is a plan of God. And we're either we're faced with one of two options this evening. You take God out of the picture and the whole of life is a series of random unrelated events that have no meaning whatsoever.

Or you put God in the picture and you come to God's word and you see that God is responsible for the beginning of the universe. And he's responsible for the salvation of human beings in Jesus.

And he has promised that a day will come when the world will come to an end. As we know it, he's also promised a recreation.

[6 : 32] And so it is not without significance that the Bible begins with, Genesis 1 is the answer to the first question.

Revelation 21 and 22 are the answer to the second question. The world will come to an end, but only when and how God determines.

God is in control. I want you to know that this evening in a world that otherwise is totally confused.

And if you try to find the answer outside God, it will only lead to more and more confusion in your mind. The answer is not out there.

The answer is here in what God has told us in the Bible and supremely in Jesus Christ, his son.

[7 : 43] And so therefore, I hope that if you're asking the question, what's it all about? And so you should be. What's the world all about? What's humanity all about?

And what am I about? Then please look in the right place. It's not far away. It's right here. You don't have to go out there.

It's here in your hand, in the pages of the Bible, in which God has made himself known to you and in Jesus Christ who has come into the world to rescue us and to bring us home to where we should be in God himself.

So Genesis 1 and Revelation 21 are the bookends, the Bible's bookends, if you like, with Revelation 21 promising that whatever has happened to spoil this world, God has remedied it and will never allow the same thing to happen again.

One thing that is different, well, there are many things different about the recreation to the original creation, but one thing is absolutely sure that there will be no chance of any further fall or any more separation.

[9 : 04] God has won the final victory and he is going to bring all of his plans to fruition. But you will have noticed as we read these two passages, the striking similarity between the terminology that's used here and what we've read before in Genesis 2 and 3.

This is God's new creation. Now, I'm not going to go through this in detail. We don't have time tonight. What I want to do is very simply to pick out some of the features of what we have read and to try and make this as simple as possible.

I'm going to do this by whittling it down to two things. The passage we've read amounts to a future promise in the first place.

The promise of the new heaven and the new earth. That's the future promise. But then, secondly, you'll notice that passage contains meanwhile commands.

Meanwhile commands. And that's because while it's all very well to look forward to what the Bible tells us about what God's going to do one day, it hasn't happened yet.

[10 : 20] That's the not yet of the Bible. We, meanwhile, are living in this life. We've got work to do tomorrow. We've got our duties to fulfill in our families and wherever we live and whatever our routines are.

We live in the here and now. And so, whilst we do want to know as much as we possibly can about the future that God has promised, we can maybe talk about some of the things that are in this passage.

Nevertheless, we, at the same time, we have to get on with life as God's people here in this world. And lo and behold, this passage gives us guidance. It gives us certain principles.

And if we follow them, we will be blessed. That's what we all want, isn't it? We want to be blessed. You know what that word means in the Bible?

I know we use it very glibly and casually sometimes, but I'm talking about the way the Bible uses it. The blessing of God is the happiness that God brings, the peace that only God brings.

[11 : 26] And it's a peace that can only be found in Jesus Christ. That's what Paul discovered when he came to faith in Jesus on the road to Damascus. He said, therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's the blessing that God promises in the gospel. And tonight, Revelation 22 gives us the way to peace.

There is only one way, and that's in Jesus. So, first of all then, what does God promise in this chapter about the not yet? Well, he promises in chapter 21, one, a new heaven and a new earth.

A new heaven. And I'm sure that whenever we've imagined this, we've tried to imagine what a new heaven and a new earth might be like. And you take some of the imagery in Revelation and you try to close your eyes and you try to picture what heaven might be like and you come up with streets of gold and trees and gates and gold and this and emeralds and all kinds of precious stones and all that.

Please remember that Revelation is symbolic. And the descriptions that we have in Revelation are symbolic. The best way to understand Revelation, by the way, is to understand the Old Testament.

[12 : 44] So if you know your Old Testament, you will be able to grasp Revelation a lot better but only when you realize that there's very little in Revelation of literal description.

It's symbolic. So anytime you pick up your Bible and you read Revelation, remember, symbol, symbol, symbol. Old Testament imagery and that applies to streets of gold and gates and all that kind of thing.

It applies to what we read there about the new Jerusalem coming down. No, we didn't read it. It goes on. It's further on in chapter 21, the new Jerusalem with a high wall and the jasper and the clearest crystal and all the rest of it.

All of these are symbolic but what they describe is something utterly, utterly, indescribably magnificent. and I believe, I personally believe, that the reason heaven isn't described in the Bible is because there is no capacity in language for God to tell us what it's going to be like.

It's just impossible because we're so restricted by length and breadth and height and time and all of these things. We're so restricted but we're talking here now about a different order altogether, a different dimension and as soon as I say that, I don't even understand what I'm saying but God does.

[14 : 19] God is the God who is not limited by any dimensions or restrictions and so what God promises us, a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be perfect bliss and unbroken happiness for all his people.

But it does appear that there will be a connection between the earth but not as we know it, the earth that has been cleansed and glorified and stripped away of all the evil influences and the impacts that have been on the earth.

There will be this unification. It's interesting, isn't it, that it tells us that there'll be a new heaven and a new earth. There seems to be a promise of a unification of what now is heaven and what now is earth in perfection when God has brought this world as we know it to an end.

Right now, heaven is separated from the earth but a time will come when that separation will disappear. It's also clear that heaven will consist of angels.

Angels. Lots of angels in Revelations. There's angels all the way through the Bible. There are angels at the very beginning. There are angels all the way there. Angels at the birth of Jesus. Angels at the resurrection.

[15 : 37] Angels in the book of Acts. We know that they exist. We don't want to spend too much time on them because we don't want to obsess over it but we do know that God has created other rational beings and they have a purpose.

They serve him. We don't see them. At least I've never seen one but we know that they are there and we know that they populate God's presence.

But more immediately to us heaven will also consist of saints and by that I don't mean super Christians Christians who have earned a certain level in their lives by that I mean men and women boys and girls who have trusted and followed Jesus Christ and they have lived in this world and they have struggled and they have fallen sometimes and they have sinned often and yet they have followed Jesus.

They have lived and died as followers of their Savior and God has taken them from this world and he has transferred them into his presence.

They're there now right now. When I leave this world I expect that I will not experience death. I expect that I will be taken immediately to the presence of God and that's what you should expect as well if you are a believer in Jesus.

[17 : 13] It's the only way to get there by believing trusting in Jesus. We'll talk about that a little bit later on. What the catechism says the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and they do immediately pass into glory and their bodies being still united to Christ rest in the grave until the resurrection.

So God's promise is that the new heaven and the new earth will be populated by people his people. It's also clear that this heavenly earth or this earthly heaven or whatever you want to call it the new heaven and the new earth is indestructible or imperishable.

The first earth was subject to failure. And then we also have to avoid trying to picture heaven according to time.

We think of eternity and we think of well it's going to be so long isn't it? I mean even a year and hour experience is just so long or ten years or whatever and I can't imagine.

Well that's because we only think of things in terms of our life. But remember what I said before that we're talking about different dimension here. And so let's try and avoid thinking about heaven in terms of our measurements.

[18 : 35] So whatever image you've had or formulated in your mind is probably wrong. And not only is it wrong but what God has planned is a million times more magnificent than we can ever imagine.

what we do know about the promise is that the dwelling of God will be amongst men. The glory of God will take the centre place in this new existence and God's people will forever in some kind of magnificent way unspoiled by sin or distraction we will be able to worship him in perfection.

There'll be no more sea. We read that in chapter 20. Again symbolic there'll be no more sea. What does that mean? The sea was a symbol of all the changeableness of life.

Remember that this vision was given to John. He was on the island of Patmos. He was surrounded by sea. Anybody who's on an island as you well know knows about the sea.

And so the sea would have meant something very meaningful to John. And he would have got up every day and he would have seen how changeable things were and it was a reflection of how changeable life was.

[19 : 53] But there'll be no more changeableness. There'll be no more disappointment. No more unpredictability. There'll be complete healing in verse 2. There'll be no more curse.

Here, those of you who read that, you'll remember that. That's a reversal of Genesis chapter 3 when God cursed the earth because of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Now there's no more curse and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there. They will see his face and his name will be on their forehead. Symbolism once again.

I'm not quite sure how that relates to the reality of heaven, but we will see his face and his name will be on our foreheads.

There'll be no more night. It'll be a different order of things altogether. God and sinners are reconciled forever. The dwelling of God is with man.

[20 : 52] We have a new creation. God has made all things new. His word is trustworthy. His city gleams with perfect, unimaginable grandeur and spectacular beauty.

So I'm out of words, I'm afraid. I don't have any words because I don't even know what words that I could possibly bring together to do justice to what God has promised.

And I can't go beyond what is in the Bible. So, so much for the new heaven and the new earth. Now, let me just, before we go into this, the reason I believe that there will be a new heaven and a new earth is because I believe in the present earth where I live and I believe in a present heaven.

And the reason I believe that is because God has created it. The ground that I stand on is ground that has come into being because God has created it.

My reality owes its existence to God. Now, if you believe that, then it shouldn't be difficult for you to believe that God one day will create another reality, a new reality, a renewed existence.

[22 : 15] It shouldn't be difficult because we're talking about the same God who is capable of anything. And so, the same faith that believes that I owe my existence to God is the same faith that believes that one day he will renew this world and he will bring about the new heaven and the new earth.

So much for the future promises. What do these passages have to tell us about the life that I live now? Well, it tells us in verse 6 in chapter 22, the first thing is that my words are true.

And so, God is saying to us, believe my words. Believe my words. Verse 6 says this, these words are trustworthy and true, and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

Now, I can't help connecting this to Genesis 3 that we had last night. And particularly, remember, the conversation that the serpent had with the woman, with Eve, and how he attempted, successfully, sadly, to undermine the truthfulness of God's word, and therefore the trustworthiness of God himself.

And so, these very first attempts to chip away, remember what we were seeing last night, to chip away at the trustworthiness of God. Here is God at the end of the Bible, and he's saying to us, I assure you, I give you my word, that my word, my promise, is trustworthy and true.

[23 : 54] Now, I know that's all we've got to go on, but the Holy Spirit has the power to implant these words and to assure us of their truthfulness.

There's something about the word of God, there's something about the Bible that resonates with us, isn't there? There's something about it, and in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and I believe that God is, as we worship him tonight, we're coming to meet with him, he's present in this building, which means that he is working in your hearts, and speaking to you, and bringing this very word, and implanting it in your consciousness.

My word is, these words are trustworthy and true, and so I hope tonight, and I would ask you tonight, that instead of doing what Eve did, and doubting God's word, that you'll just lay hold upon them and trust them, because they are the words of God.

He tells us, in verse 13, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. I'm the root and the descendant of David, the bright and morning star.

Now, he tells us two things that we are to do. One is what we should do with God's word, and the other one is what we shouldn't do.

[25 : 21] First of all, we must not keep quiet about it. Verse 10 it tells us, and he said to me, do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

Now, that's a word to the church. Do not seal up the prophecy of this book. Let's just spend a moment thinking about what does he mean by this book. He's just been told to sit down and to write what he's seen, so it could mean the book of Revelation.

Then there's another book in Revelation chapter 5, the scroll that was in the hand of the one who sat on the throne. And if you read chapter 5, it becomes very obvious that that is the will of God, the purpose of God.

But if it is, whatever it is, it is God's message, and I take it to mean the Bible, because the Bible is God's complete, perfect, infallible word.

And what he's saying to the church is, make sure that you do not seal it up, don't keep quiet about it. There is nothing to be ashamed of. And I think if ever there was a time when we needed to be encouraged not to be ashamed of that we believe in the words of the Bible, it's today.

[26 : 33] Because the whole atmosphere of the world outside will tell us, well, if you want to be a Christian, that's fine, just keep it to yourself.

God tells us not to keep it to ourselves. God tells us there's a whole world out there that needs to hear about Jesus, and a world full of darkness and confusion in which his word is the only source of light there is.

So there's no reason to be ashamed. Like Paul said once, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. And we might be very tempted to assume that the world is hostile, and to a large extent it is hostile.

But remember that the world outside contains all kinds of people. It contains some who are deeply hostile to the gospel, but it also contains people who are asking questions.

And how do you know as God leads you and guides you through this world that you will not come across people who are asking those questions. And you might be the means of their coming to know Jesus.

[27 : 52] We are his witnesses. We are his ambassadors. We are living epistles. He's told us to let our light shine. Now I don't mean that we preach a sermon to everyone that we meet and that we use every single, every time we sit beside someone and make a pester of ourselves.

No, you're asking God to give you the opportunity by your life and by your witness to make known what you believe. What was it Jesus said to the man out of whom he had cast the demons?

Go and tell the people what God has done for you. Go and give them your testimony. So when people ask you what were you doing at the weekend, don't be ashamed of saying I went to church at the weekend.

I go to church every day. Who knows, they might close up, it might be end of conversation, but you go to church. Well, which church do you go to? Well, when do you start going to church? And then as an open door, as a green light, you can tell them what God has done for you.

Do not seal the prophecy of this book. And of course it's a challenge to the church collectively as well. That's why we exist, to make Jesus known in Stornoway.

[29 : 02] And I'm sure that you're using every means to continue that witness. Then it tells us something else in verse 18.

It says, do not add to, if anyone adds to the words of the prophecy of this book, or if they take away from them, God will take away his share in the tree of life, in the holy city, which are described in this book.

And what God is saying to John is this, that whatever you do, don't distort or pervert what I have written and said.

Don't twist my truth. Again, there is a reference to Genesis 3. That's exactly what the serpent tried to do with Eve.

He tried to distort what God had said. And by so doing, he provided the opportunity for her to take the forbidden fruit.

[30 : 06] And we are being commanded here that we're not to make of the Bible what we want. We're not to interpret the Bible according to ourselves or to suit ourselves.

We're to take God at his word. And there's a very important reason why he says that. And the reason is this, because God wants people to come to faith in him. He doesn't want people to believe a false gospel.

And there are many false gospels out there. He wants people to discover the truth of Jesus Christ and that truth that we have in his word.

The second thing, and I'm watching the time and we're going to bring things to a close very quickly, this book promises the imminent return of Jesus. And so we're to live in that promise.

We're to live in the promise of the imminent return of Jesus. Verse 12, verse 7, verse 20, three times in this chapter we're told, I am coming soon.

[31 : 11] Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me to repay everyone for what he has done. Now this was a promise that goes all the way back to when Jesus left the world in the first place, when he ascended to heaven 40 days after rising from the dead, and the angel promised the disciples that he would return, in the same way as he left the world.

So you can picture this one, you can imagine Jesus appearing in the sky one day. I know, I know how strange that appears in an unbelieving world, and yet that is the promise that Jesus gives, in the same way as he left the world.

Well, what do we know about his coming? It will be at a time when we do not know. Don't believe anyone that tells you that they've worked out. Don't believe, no matter how plausible it seems, don't believe anyone that tells you that they've worked out when Jesus is going to come again.

I think I read somewhere even recently that somebody has, the internet is full of the greatest nonsense. Please don't believe. Anyone that tells you that they've worked out.

You'll get people who say, I've studied the Bible, I've done the maths, and I've got it right this time, and this is when Jesus is going to come. Prophecies like that, by the way, go all the way back hundreds of years.

[32 : 40] We even got it wrong in the 17th century. The Puritans got it wrong even. Some of the Puritans that we hold up in such high esteem, some of them believed that this year is the year of the millennium and all that kind of thing, and they were wrong.

They were completely wrong. So don't believe it. Don't believe it because the Bible says that the Son of Man will come at a time when you do not expect, like a thief in the night. It'll be a surprise to everyone and a shock to many people.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4, he says, He'll come in glory.

There was nothing very visibly manifest about his first coming, but there will be in the second coming. He was born in obscurity, but he will come again in splendor and majesty, and every eye will see him.

I am coming soon. We're to live in the light of that coming. You know, you get people saying, well, we're to live each day as if it was our last. And I think that's good advice.

[34 : 05] I think we were always to live in the consciousness. But I'm not sure how possible it is to do that on a practical level. We have to make some plans for the future, but we must always, always live in the light of that promise that I am coming soon.

We do not know when he will come. Lastly, this book, says Revelation, says God in Revelation, is a message that demands a response.

And I'm going to, I want to think about three things as we bring things to a close. Three things that are in, three responses, three kinds of people that God addresses his words to in this last chapter.

First of all, in verse 11, he says, let the evildoer still do evil. Let the evildoer still do evil.

Now, at first sight, you think, whoa, that's a bit unexpected. Because surely, surely, surely, if this is a message of good news, surely the message would be, well, turn from your evildoer doing and repent and come to faith.

[35 : 28] But that's not what it says. It says, let the evildoer still do evil. And the filthy still be filthy. And the right, but we'll come on to that in a moment. Let the evildoer still do evil.

What does that mean? What is God saying in these words? Well, here's what I believe he's saying. He's saying this. This is the end of the Bible. This is the end of my message.

I've said everything that I have to say. I cannot, there is nothing more to be said. I've sent my son into the world.

He has died on the cross to secure your forgiveness, your salvation. He's risen again as a proof of who he is. He has offered to you eternal life by believing in him.

If at the end of all of that, I promise that you will have eternal life, you'll rise from the dead, you'll come to heaven, you will, that there will be a new heaven and a new earth if you believe in Jesus.

[36 : 33] And if at the end of all of that, your answer is no. It's your call.

That's what I believe it means. It's a dramatic way of saying it. But if God can get through to you in a dramatic way, then so be it.

He's using extreme language to express and to impress upon you the seriousness of what you're doing. If your answer is still no, he says, let the evildoer still do evil.

That's a massively serious thought, isn't it? I'll leave it with you. But then he talks to another group of people and he says, they're righteous.

They're righteous. Now, there's nobody righteous by themselves. So don't get the impression that there are some people who have somehow lived such a great life that God calls them righteous.

[37 : 47] There's only one way in which God will call you righteous and that is by faith in Jesus Christ. Christ. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, then God calls us righteous. That's the way to be.

That's what the gospel is all about. That's what God promises us in the death of Jesus. His righteousness. Our standing before him. And he says, let the righteous still do right.

In other words, keep going. Keep going. Keep persevering. Life can be so difficult as believers, for believers, in a world in which so many things are thrown at us and there's so much sin in us still to be warred with.

But just keep going. Keep looking to Jesus. Keep putting into practice his word. And then lastly, the very last words of revelation are these.

The one who is thirsty. Verse 17. Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

[39 : 00] I cannot think of any simpler words in which to explain the gospel, the invitation of the God.

Here is God. These are not my words. These are God's words. And they're saying this. Are you thirsty? I'm not going to go into the biology of what it means to be thirsty.

We all know what it means to be thirsty. Are you thirsty? God says if you are, come and drink.

There are no more simple words in the Bible. The gospel, you cannot, and this is why God is saying don't complicate the gospel. Don't twist the gospel to make it complicated. Make sure that you keep the words that I've, in which I've explained the gospel.

Are you thirsty? Then come and take and drink. It's God's gift. You can't do anything to earn it.

[40 : 08] So don't try. Just come and take it. Without money and without price. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will that your word will dwell in our hearts. And we pray that your word in the hands of your Holy Spirit will have an impact as we go away from this place and as we think more about what we've, about what your plan is.

This world is not a random series of events, but you will bring it to a close and you will bring about the new heaven and the new earth.

And Lord, our prayer is that all of us, all of us here tonight, all of us, everyone without exception will be there. But nobody will be left out. Nobody will be on the outside. But that all of us will take the water of life that Jesus offers us in the gospel.

In his name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing in the traditional version of Psalm 100.

[41 : 31] It's on page 362 and it's Heron Gate. The reason this psalm came to my mind is when I was thinking of Revelation 21 and 22, that I thought of the great company of people and that consists of people in the world from all nations and tribes and languages who have come to know Jesus.

And this is our prayer. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice and him serve with mirth as praise force tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

Psalm 100 and we'll stand to sing. Amen. O people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

And set with birth and space forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed. We are his flock he doth us feed.

[43 : 13] And for his sheep he doth us take. O enter then his gates with praise approach with joy his course unto praise God and bless his name always praise.

For it is simply so to do. For why the Lord our God is true.

His mercy is forever true. His truth that all times firmly stood and shall from age to age endure.

Our Father in heaven we thank you for all your goodness and all the privilege that belongs to us. And we do pray that we may have the grace and the strength to apply your word into our lives as we let our light so shine.

We thank you for the provision that you make for us every day and for the provision that has been made for us next door in our fellowship. Make us thankful for it all. And we bless you for the hands that prepared it and for all the goodness that you have given to your church.

[45 : 05] And now may grace and mercy and peace from both from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rest on and abide with each one of us both now and always. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.