

Blessed to All Eternity (Revelation 21:3-4)

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[0 : 00] Why does God permit death? Perhaps you have heard different arguments that are made, or perhaps we might be inclined! to try to excuse God from the occurrence of death.

! Sometimes we might rejoice in the work of God's almighty hand. For example, if there was a boat of pirates and sex traders who were going to kidnap children to use them for the sex trade, and this boat was shipwrecked and the occupants were killed, then we probably wouldn't hesitate in such a case to praise God and to see God's sovereignty over it.

But what if the following week, if there was a boat full of missionaries who also were on a similar voyage and the boat of missionaries capsized and all of the missionaries died, would we be likewise inclined to acknowledge God as the first cause and his sovereignty as the one who numbers the days of all of our lives?

So some may wish to try to excuse God from death, as though perhaps he wasn't present at the time, or perhaps an equivalent enemy force may have turned the tides against God.

But the notion of an absent or impotent God doesn't bring us any comfort in death, nor is that the God of the Bible?

[1 : 39] The answer to the occurrences of death is not because of any insufficiency in God. Rather, the answer is about divine love.

And divine love is not to the exclusion of any of God's perfections, that is, his attributes, his perfect attributes. Divine love is not to the exclusion of all the perfections of God, but all of the perfections of God are on display in the demonstration of love by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his infinite wisdom, his almighty power, his steadfast love, his transcendent holiness, his incorruptible justice, his unchanging goodness, and this expression of love.

And the expression of love bears great cost. God permits death because his holiness and justice demands punishment of sin.

So then our next question would be, why then did God permit sin? Why couldn't God's creatures merely love him as creator in a world without redemption?

So if you take up your copies of the word of God in Revelation 21, our focus this morning will be verses 3 and 4, but we will read verses 1 to 11.

[3 : 07] Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, 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 heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people.

God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.

There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then he who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful.

And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

[4 : 23] He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.

Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for divine testimony.

We thank you, Lord, that we have a glimpse of your glory and the hope of the inheritance of the saints of that which is to come because of that which Christ has accomplished, purchased redemption.

[5 : 37] We pray, Lord, that as we consider the things contained in your word this morning, that you would be in our midst, that you would speak to us through your word and by your spirit. I pray that you would use me in the preaching of your word and you would make it effectual to all the hearers.

We pray, Lord, that you would be glorified. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we will be looking particularly at verses 3 and 4 this morning.

And what's going on in these two verses, what we'll be looking at, is that the end purpose of creation of sin and death is that God's people may truly know perfect blessedness through redemption in Christ to the praise of his glory.

So I'll say that again. The end purpose of creation, sin, and death is that God's people truly know perfect blessedness through redemption in Christ to the praise of his glory.

So we will look at three particular things. Perfect blessedness, the end goal from the beginning. The end from the beginning. Second of all, perfect blessedness positively stated, which is the presence and glory of God.

[6 : 48] And then thirdly, perfect blessedness negatively stated, or the negation, which is the removal of suffering. So the end goal from the beginning, God's presence and glory, and the removal of suffering.

So first of all, perfect blessedness, the end goal from the beginning. Now, in theology, as theology is divided up and systematized, there are names associated with different things where they're drawn out from all of the Bible and put together to understand what that particular thing is.

And there's a word in theology called eschatology. And eschatology simply means the study of last things. And in the Bible, the Bible begins with an eschatological purpose.

That is the end goal from before the beginning. God's redemptive purpose, God's eternal redemptive purpose, is in focus and foreshadowed from the beginning as it is then worked out through time and revealed by farther steps.

So let's quickly and briefly examine the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible. At the beginning of the Bible, what do we see? Well, we see creation.

[8 : 06] And then what else do we see? We see a marriage, the first marriage, and it is a wonderful marriage and a good marriage and it is a beautiful marriage. It's creation and then marriage. And then what do we see?

We see sin. We see that Adam doesn't cast evil out of the garden. And as a result of evil not being cast out, there's the fall, there's sin, there's the curse, and there's death.

Now, let's consider the ending of the Bible. At the ending of the Bible, we see another marriage. This time, it's the last marriage and a better marriage. It's the marriage supper of the Lamb.

What else do we see at the end of the Bible? We also see Satan, the serpent of old, is cast into the lake of fire. Adam failed to cast evil out. Here at the end, we see Satan is cast into the lake of fire and the final judgment of all sin.

What else do we see at the end? Instead of seeing creation, we see a new creation. New creation, eternal city of God. Now, going back to the beginning of the Bible, Adam and Eve, before the fall, they were in a state of innocence.

[9 : 16] That is, they had not sinned. They were not sinful. And in that state of innocence, they were in the garden. And being without sin, being in the garden, the garden being a temple sanctuary, the dwelling place of God, they were in the presence of God.

The presence of God dwelling with them. And then as we read through the Bible, we see the tabernacle and the temple. And we see that in the tabernacle and in the temple is God's dwelling place with his people.

And in the tabernacle and the temple, we read of the Holy of Holies. And the Holy of Holies is the particular location of the dwelling of God with his people, but the Holy of Holies is guarded.

The Holy of Holies is guarded by angels. There's angels in the Holy of Holies, which is symbolic of it being protected by the angels, which bar the unclean.

If you remember back in the garden, after the sin, after the fall, Adam and Eve were barred from the temple sanctuary presence of God. And the angels were placed there with flaming swords to protect it from the unclean because of sin.

[10 : 28] But also in the Holy of Holies with the angels, symbolic of protecting and barring the unclean, there's something else going on with the presence or the symbolic presence of the angels there.

And 1 Peter 1.12 tells us, that the angels longed to look upon Christ's fulfillment of the law and the redemption of his people.

And as 1 Peter 1.12 tells us, that the angels longed to look into these things. As we then look into the book of Revelation, we see the end result of those things which the angels longed to look upon.

But this time, instead of the cherubim with flaming swords barring the way, this time, here the angels are welcoming the way, saying, come and see, to Christ's church triumphant, ushered into the glorious presence of Christ.

So where the unclean were cast out and barred from God's presence, here the angels are saying, come and see the way has been opened by Christ as Christ's church triumphant is ushered into the glorious presence of God.

[11 : 45] So that brings us to our second point. The full enjoyment of God in perfect blessedness is the presence and glory of God. The full enjoyment of God in perfect blessedness is the presence and glory of God.

So our second point is, perfect blessedness, God dwelling with his people. If you notice in verse 3 in your Bibles, it says this, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people.

God himself will be with them and be their God. We see here the greatest blessing of the eternal new creation kingdom.

That is God dwelling, God tabernacling with his people. And we understand from reading back in the Old Testament the wilderness promises of which they longed for, of which they looked forward to, of God's dwelling presence with his people.

God's presence and manifest glory, God's covenant promises being fulfilled. That is the glorified saints and the fullness of joy with perfect soul and perfected body, with the sight of the soul, seeing God who is our portion and enjoying him.

[13 : 05] The greatest blessing of the eternal new creation kingdom is God. God is our portion, seeing God and enjoying him. So let's break that down a little bit.

First of all, the presence of God, the blessedness of the presence of God or God dwelling with his people. Ignatius of Antioch, an early church father who was martyred for the faith.

He was killed. He was taken to Rome where he was cast in with wild beasts who tore him apart as a public spectacle for his faith.

And while he was taken to Rome, he knew that he would be martyred. And this is what he said on the way to Rome. He said, Why, moreover, did I surrender myself to death, to fire, to sword, to wild beasts?

Well, to be near the sword is to be near God. To be in the claws of wild beasts is to be in the hands of God. Only let it be done in the name of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 06] He saw that death only brought him closer to God in the glorious beauty of being in the presence of God. The presence of God by which we will enjoy blessedness and perfect communion with God, but unhindered by sin and corruption.

We will have a blessed and perfect communion with God, but the sin which corrupts us now will not corrupt our communion with God in glory and perfect blessedness. That is because of purchased grace.

That is a grace which has been purchased by the shedding of the blood of Christ for his people. To be in the presence of God is to truly know God. John 17, 3 says, And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

So, the greatest blessing of the eternal new creation kingdom is the presence of God, to truly know God, and to behold his manifest glory.

And we see further in verse 11 about the glory of God, but what does it mean to behold the glory of God? Three things we can draw from this. The first of all is an intellectual sight of the soul beholding the glory of God and not dying, but having life eternal.

[15 : 24] We as sinful creatures cannot behold the glory of God and live, but having glorified bodies by the light of glory to have an intellectual vision of the glory of God and not die from it, but have life eternal.

So, an intellectual sight of the soul beholding the glory of God is second of all, seeing our Redeemer face to face in transcendent glory. Job 19, 25-27 says, For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth, and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold and not another, how my heart yearns within me.

That which we can think about now and what causes our hearts to yearn within us is what will be perfected in glory, an intellectual sight of the glory of God, and seeing our Redeemer face to face in transcending glory.

And then third of all, beholding the glory of God is seeing the glory of God in the resurrected saints beholding the glory of God and responding in eternal praises.

So, the resurrected saints not only having an intellectual vision of the glory of God, not only beholding our Redeemer face to face, but also all the saints, a multitude beyond numbering, beholding the glory of God, and overflowing with responses of eternal praises.

[17:00] This is a glory beyond anything that we can relate to. 1 Corinthians 2.9 says, I has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.

So, if no eye has seen anything that can compare to the glory of God, then, really, how can you describe something? How can you describe something that no eye has seen?

How can you describe something that sinful man cannot relate to? In the hymn that we sang, Immortal and Visible, Light Inaccessible, God's glory is inaccessible to sinful humans in a fallen world.

So, how do you describe something that far surpasses our capacity to understand, that far surpasses anything that we have even seen, no eye has seen, how do you describe such a thing that we cannot relate to?

Well, John, in the book of Revelation, what he does is that he describes something so radiant that man cannot look upon and live, he uses analogical language of beautiful things that man can behold.

[18:10] He takes that which we can behold and by really analogy of proportionality, he just heaps on word upon word of beautiful things that we can behold and heaping word upon word, heaping beauty upon beauty, he uses terms such as various precious stones and crystal and pure gold and all of these things is heaping on beauty upon beauty because it's the best he can do for something which no eye has seen and we don't have the capacity to understand.

But, the words that he uses also points us to something else, doesn't it? the words that he uses are things which point us back to temple sanctuaries. Temple sanctuaries in the temple and the tabernacle as well as in the Garden of Eden.

Things which point back to temple sanctuaries, to priesthood and to the presence and glory of God. And all of this pointing towards the radiant glory of God and the Lamb.

So that brings us to our third point. The full enjoyment of God and perfect blessedness includes the removal of sin.

So we see it positively stated, the presence and glory of God, but perfect blessedness negatively stated is that the full enjoyment of God and perfect blessedness includes the removal of all suffering.

[19:36] Perfect blessedness, the removal of suffering. Look at verse 4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.

There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. And this we see is a fulfillment from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 25, verse 8, which says, He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

We need to understand that the Christian life is a life of suffering. Becoming a Christian doesn't alleviate us from suffering because this is not the state of glory. This is not paradise, which is the hope of the saints and the inheritance of believers.

The Christian life is a life of trials and tribulations. We are not in the state of glory, but the redeemed on earth are in a state of grace in a sin-cursed world undergoing the pain associated with the effects of the fall.

Suffering is guaranteed to all creation. All creation groans. Suffering is also guaranteed to all those who desire to live a godly life. And in suffering comes many tears.

[20 : 56] John Flavel, who's an English Puritan from the 1600s, he gave a description of tears, which I think is quite appropriate. He says that tears are of a mind oppressed and squeezed with grief.

Grief compresses the heart. The heart so compressed and squeezed vents itself sometimes into tears, sighs, and groans.

In a sin-cursed world, there are tears from the grief of death, but, sorry, there are tears from the grief of death, there are tears of sorrow from various afflictions associated from this being a fallen, sin-cursed world.

We see here that God will wipe away every tear. This is not just consolation. This isn't a bottomless Kleenex box to wipe away continuous tears.

What it means when it says God will wipe away every tear is the total and final removal of tears. The removal of all cause and faculty of weeping.

[22 : 08] Death is removed, sorrow is removed, and crying is removed. The misery of sin and all that it entails is gone, swallowed up, finished, and it is replaced with joy.

Now, Scripture uses the metaphor of marriage and in verse 2 we see the metaphor of marriage alluded to again. The metaphor of marriage brings to mind joy.

It brings to mind happiness. It brings to mind beauty, the joy of a wedding feast celebrating covenant commitment. It is a metaphor in which we in this life can relate to.

But not everybody can relate to the joy of marriage. Not everybody can relate to this metaphor. Perhaps there is some who want to marry but never did marry.

Or perhaps someone who married but was emotionally broken by spousal unfaithfulness or desertion or abuse. in verse 2 it refers to the bride of Christ.

[23 : 18] That is the church. That is the blood bought bride of Christ. And this is a covenant commitment that will have no arguments, no disappointment, no abuse, no division and no neglect.

It will never result in unfaithfulness or abandonment. There will never be tears of loneliness, never tears of betrayal. There will be no more sorrow.

This is the removal of death. And death, as we know, is the consequence of the fall, the consequence of sin. And death is the source of grief and of sorrow and of pain.

Remove death and there will be no cause of tears, no cause of pain, no cause of sorrow and suffering. So, how exactly has death been defeated?

How has death been defeated and God's perfection is displayed? It is by Christ's victory over sin and death. The skull-crushing seed of the woman in Genesis 3.15, Genesis 3.15 says that he will be bruised and he was indeed bruised, but he was wounded for our transgressions.

[24 : 38] He was bruised for our iniquities. He bore our sins to pay our ransom and he was raised for our justification.

That is justification by faith alone, being reconciled to God by faith in Christ alone. The Orthodox Catechism asks the question, what is your only comfort in life and death?

that I am not my own, but belong body and soul and life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things must work together for my salvation because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

We see that eternal blessedness, blessedness to all eternity is the removal of all sorrow, the removal of death, the removal of suffering, but it's not just the removal of death and sorrow.

[25 : 58] It is also joy inexpressible. Isaiah 51 11 says, so the ransom of God shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads.

They shall obtain joy and gladness, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. And then also in Psalm 1611 it says, in your presence is fullness of joy.

At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Now the synopsis of pure theology explains this and I think it captures it quite well.

For it could happen in no other way when indeed the body of man is set free from every weakness of sin and nature and is in conformity with Christ's glorious body and the soul is free of every struggle of the flesh and the spirit and joys beholding the divine essence and glory.

When indeed I say the whole man will be drenched with real comfort and his soul in inexpressible joy just as Christ promised, blessed are those who mourn for they shall receive comfort.

[27 : 11] Now we see in verse 4 that there is the removal of pain and that a reason is given for the removal of pain. For the former things have passed away.

The old is gone. All things are made new, completed, perfected, God's eternal and unthwartable plan of redemption, the end goal from the beginning, brought to perfect completion.

redemption. So we see God's perfect, unthwartable, eternal purpose of redemption, the end goal from the beginning as it is worked out in time and experienced by temporal creatures.

We see also eternal blessedness or blessedness to all eternity, perfect blessedness positively stated, and that's the presence of glory and of God. and then we see also perfect blessedness negatively stated, that is the removal of death and sorrow and suffering.

So concluding uses to take from this. This does not speak of universalism. Universalism is an idea that every soul will be saved regardless of faith and repentance.

[28 : 28] This does not speak of universalism. There is a distinction that is made between the clean and the unclean, which is what makes it so astonishing. There is a distinction made between those who will be in the presence and glory of God and those whom will be barred, those who are unclean.

That distinction, we see it being explained in verse 8 of Revelation 21. And as we work through it, the sorrow and the death that we experience in this life, it is but a foretaste of hell.

It is but a foretaste of the second and never-ending death. So notice the distinction of May between those who are inside and those who are outside. In verse 8, it says, but the cowardly, unbelieving, and we might think, yes, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as mediator, those who do not have faith, I see how that makes sense.

The unbelieving, abominable, murderers, and we agree, we say yes, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And then we might recall what the Bible says, that those who have hatred in their heart, that they have violated the sixth commandment, that they have committed murder in their heart, or that those who look lustfully upon another person, that they have committed adultery in their heart, they have violated the seventh commandment.

[30 : 13] And that it takes but one sin to be unclean, to be cast out, to be barred from the presence of God. Or even we'll go on and say, and all liars, how many of us have never told a lie in our entire lives?

And as we read this, we realize that none of us have perfectly obeyed God's law. None of us have accomplished what is required, perfect righteousness, to be in the presence of a holy and just God.

That all, then, are under condemnation, and the wages of sin is death. And we see here that that death, what that means is they will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

So if all have sinned, if all have fallen short of the glory of God, if all are unclean, if all of us can look at that and say, I have done that at least once in my life, then what hope is there?

How is there a distinction made where anybody has life? How does anybody enter into the presence and glory of a just, righteous, and holy God?

[31 : 21] Because we know that God's divine love is not to the exclusion of his other attributes or of his perfections. The unclean cannot enter the presence of God, who is a consuming fire, just as Adam and Eve barred from the garden after the fall.

They committed one sin, and they were barred. from the temple sanctuary presence of God. All who have broken God's law in any way cannot stand before a holy, unchanging, righteous, just God, and he will by no means clear the guilty.

So here's the thing. If you stand self-represented before God trying to claim your own righteousness, you stand condemned. It is only by being united to Christ by faith, washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness because divine justice has been satisfied on the cross.

Paid in full, it is finished. Furthermore, his body, his bride, the church, he represents and presents as a glorious church without spot, without wrinkle, or blemish, according to Christ's perfect, exact, entire, perpetual obedience, which is imputed, or which is accredited to his people.

And this righteousness, this right standing, is received by faith alone. It is not by anything in us. It is not by any merit within us. There is no scale of balance to see if the good outweighs the bad.

[33 : 02] One sin is deemed to be unclean and barred from the presence of God. That is why we need to be washed in the blood of Christ and to be robed in the righteousness of Christ, to be presented by Christ as our mediator, as his body, the glorious church.

So to return to the original question that I asked, why did God allow sin, which resulted in condemnation and death? Why is it that God's creatures can't just love God in a world without sin and without redemption, merely knowing God as creator?

It is through the work of redemption that his people would not just know about him, but personally and experientially know him in the fullness of his perfection.

That's his love, his mercy, his grace, his wisdom, his justice, his holiness, and in knowing him fully, loving him fully, and in loving him fully, enjoying him fully, and being perfectly blessed forevermore, dwelling with him in a state of glory indefectible, unable to sin, unable to be corrupted, unable to fade, in a kingdom that cannot be shaken, where having put on incorruptibility and immortality, glorified and perfected saints, bear testimony to God's faithfulness and goodness, and say, O death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 54] Our great God, we praise you that you are infinitely wise and that in your infinite wisdom that you, according to your own counsel, that you sovereignly ordained, your plan of redemption in a sin-cursed world, we thank you that you are good, we thank you that you are glorious, we thank you for your perfections and the outworking of your love, your mercy, your grace, your wisdom, your justice, your holiness, that all this comes together at the cross where the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died to pay the penalty of sin, to purchase the people of God, that the people of God would be washed in his blood, pardoned of all of their sins, clothed in his righteousness, made right with God, united to God, communing with God.

We thank you, Lord, for the hope in which we have, the hope of the saints, the hope of our inheritance, with the presence and glory of God, where we will behold God with an intellectual vision of the soul, where we will see our Redeemer face to face, and we will see the glorified saints rejoicing and worshiping you, seeing your glory.

We thank you also, Lord, for the removal of all sorrow, of all death, of all pain, and all suffering. We thank you for the glimpse of that which we have, of the inheritance of the saints, and a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

So we pray for your kingdom to come. We pray that you would come, Lord Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.