

The dwelling place of God

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[0 : 00] We have two readings this evening. I will be mentioning others throughout the sermon, but the two readings are in familiar parts of the Bible. Psalm 19, verses 1 through to the end of 2, and then Revelation 21, verses 1 through to 4.

So you can turn to both. You can read one and listen to the other one. It's entirely up to you. But I'm going to begin in Psalm 19 and then go to Revelation afterwards. So now hear God's word, verses 1 and 2. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. In Revelation 21, we read verses 1 through to 4. Again, hear God's word.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

[1 : 17] 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, nor crying, nor pain any more.

For the former things have passed away. Well, I ask God's blessing upon his word in both cases, and of course upon our understanding.

And we'll come back to both after we've sung this next hymn. In many ways, it won't matter too much where you have your Bibles open, whether it's in Psalm 1 and 2, or in Revelation chapter 21, verses 1 through to 4.

[2 : 42] They're fairly easy to remember in both cases. The images in both are clear. In Psalm, it's about the heavens being a witness of God, and the skies declaring God's handiwork.

And then, of course, in Revelation, it's making one clear statement. And, of course, the blessings that come with being where God is, or rather, as Revelation 21 puts it, God being where man is.

And so, what I would like to do as we begin is perhaps tell you something. Several years ago, I've had many conversations about heaven with many different people.

And I can remember growing up, again, this is several years ago, and not wanting to go to heaven. And the reason I didn't want to go there is because the pictures that I had of heaven in my mind were not that appealing.

They were mainly white. They were mainly floaty. They were mainly unclear as to what you actually did there.

[3 : 56] And then, of course, as I, you know, got older and as I read more of God's word and as I studied more, I realized that actually the images that I had of the future were not the images that Scripture was proclaiming about the future.

And so, I've had other conversations with people now who don't want to go to heaven because they don't like the idea of perhaps praising God 24 hours of the day.

But, the difficulty that I have with that is that when they talk about earthly things, they say, well, there are no differences in day. We worship every day is the same.

And I think what happens is there's great confusion over what we will be doing in the future and what that future will actually be like. But, there is no reason for there to be great confusion or even great controversy for the very simple reason that God has said all the way through creation what is going to be true in the end as it was in the beginning.

And as Revelation 21 points out, that God's dwelling place is with man. This is something to rejoice in. But, it's hard to imagine what that place might look like because we've only got this place to go

on.

[5 : 24] And so, one of the things I want to draw your attention to just this evening is that there is a big difference between a copy and a reflection.

Now, a copy, if we say the painter or a painter painting the night sky, the heavens above us, right? The stars of the night sky, the stars of the night sky, or even a beautiful landscape. It is an artist impression. It is a copy. It's not a reflection. It's his impression of what he is looking at looks like.

His twist, perhaps, on it. But, if you were to put a well-placed mirror underneath the sky, you would have a reflection. And the Christian life is not to be like that of a painting.

It is to be like that of the mirror. And what I mean by that is, is that as we live our Christian life, the thing that God wants us to be clear on is that we are to reflect what is above us.

[6 : 29] We are not to come up with an artistic impression, copy, of what is above us. And that's the main difference that God is trying to convey always.

And one of the best ways that he's actually conveyed that is by making us in his image. We reflect God, and we are to reflect God back to God, and we are to reflect God out into the world.

We are not to make ourselves an interpretation of what God has made us. We're not to repaint us. We're not to reimagine us. We're not to come up with a different interpretation of who we are.

We are what God made us. And to truly appreciate what God made us, then we are to be like the mirror, perfectly adjusted, so that we reflect perfectly what is above us.

And God, by putting us in Christ Jesus, is sort of cleaning that mirror, readjusting the mirror, being in the right place, reflecting the right things.

[7 : 33] The heavens above us declare the glory of God. Okay, the sky proclaims his handiwork.

The night sky proclaims his handiwork. In Romans 1, it says that the whole of creation declares who God is.

Everything around us is reflecting God. And so we shouldn't be all surprised that we too, being made in the image of God, are to reflect God as well.

We're also to reflect what the kingdom of God is like. The Sermon of the Mount is Jesus demonstrating, proclaiming to people who belong to him, what kingdom people look like, and what it actually looks like to live in the kingdom of God in a fallen world.

Again, these people are to reflect that truth. We're not to come up with an artistic impression of that truth. We're simply to be in the right place, angled in the right way, through worship, so that we may reflect to the world what God is like.

In the same way the heavens declare the glory of God, in the same way the skies proclaim God's handiwork, in the same way creation speaks about who God is and what he has done. We, in exactly the same way, through no work of our own, but simply by reflecting God, will be the same type of witnesses as the heavens above us, the stars above us, the creation around us.

[8 : 57] We are to reflect what God is like in the world. But more importantly, is an underlying truth here, or not so much underlying, but it comes through all the way through scripture, and in Revelation 21, we have it revealed that God's dwelling place is with man.

Now that is something, again, which is not always reflected, in the fact that many people in the church are wanting to leave to go to be where God is, only for God to tell us at the end of his book that he's coming to be where we are, that the dwelling place of God is with man.

And the reason we find that difficult to grasp is because we think, well, how can God come to a place like this? And the truth is, he won't. Because whatever place we are in the future, that is the place that God will come to.

There is going to be a new heavens and a new earth. This world is full of corruption. It's full of sin. It's full of everything that spoils a beautiful reflection of God.

We try our very best to reflect God, but we do so through sin. We do so through a world that's just full of corruption of different kinds.

[10 : 17] Those who aren't sure about what will happen in the future, i.e. worshipping God around his throne, sometimes then find it very difficult to worship God around his throne now.

And that's because they're unable to reflect what will be true in the future. Because they don't like the picture of the future, they're not too sure about fulfilling that picture down here now.

And so the worship of God by God's people begins to subside. It begins to disappear. Because the picture that we have is not one that we necessarily like.

I want to argue that such people are a poor reflection of what the future will be. That such people are a poor reflection of what the new heavens and the new earth will actually be.

God has made us to reflect the future. God has made us to reflect what will be. And if we move away from that, if we do things in our own way, then what's really happening is not that we're coming up with a picture of our own.

[11 : 20] What's really happening is not that we're coming up with an artistic impression all by ourselves. We're actually no longer reflecting the future. We're no longer reflecting the new creation that we are.

And what God is teaching us through his word, and of course in Christ most importantly, is that we are made in the image of God. And that our purpose on earth is to reflect God to each other, to him and to the world around us.

And this little sentence in Revelation, that the dwelling place of God is with man, is argued and presented all the way through scripture, right from the very beginning.

And yet that doesn't stop too many Christians living in a fallen world, wanting to leave. Wanting to give up on this world, because God can't do anything with it.

And yet God can redeem people. He can lift people out of the pit. He can save people in a moment. He can restore relationships.

[12 : 26] He can restore a person. He can restore anything, at any point, at any time. And we need to be used to the way that God does what he does, and how he does it.

We shouldn't be wanting to escape. We should be wanting to pray and reflect the things that God has always done. And that is take something old, and make it new. Take something which is corrupted, and make it beautiful.

God doesn't run away. He doesn't give up. God isn't the man who sits at the desk, scribbling down a piece of paper, and when he gets it wrong, he scrunches it up and throws it in the waste paper bin to the side of him.

That's not the picture we have of God. The picture that we have is a God who comes down into the waste paper bin, and takes out all of their mess, and puts it right.

That's redemption. That's Christ coming. That's the picture of God. And so this is a burden, as Ecclesiastes puts it, that's almost too heavy for us to carry.

[13 : 30] And here's why. Revelation 21 paints a picture of unhindered fellowship. Nothing gets in the way of our fellowship with God. Not even a single tear can fall from the eye in Revelation 21.

There's not a single burden that can stop us from enjoying the fellowship that we have with God. Not a single thing, we're told, can cause a hindrance to our fellowship with God.

But we live in a time where we don't enjoy that unhindered fellowship. Everything hinders our fellowship with God. Everything hinders our prayer life with God. Everything hinders our worship of God here.

There's so many things that get in the way, and we are constantly having to battle against these things. These things of pain and crying and tears and upset, that will be no more in the future, are the very things of the present, that makes fellowship with God very difficult.

And we know it makes it very difficult, apart from a number of other things as well. But there is coming a day, when we will enjoy unhindered fellowship with God.

[14 : 43] When we will enjoy his unhindered presence with us. When we will have a fellowship with God, that is completely without fault.

Error of any kind. It'll be smooth. It'll be seamless. And the duty of the church is to reflect that now. But we do so in a world where it's difficult to do it.

But that's what we are to reflect. This is how Solomon puts it in Ecclesiastes, in a slightly different way, but it gets to the heart of the point. He says, What burdens man the most, what troubles you the very most, is that you know deep in your heart you were made for eternity, not for time.

You were made for eternity, you were not made for time. And God has put that sense of eternity in your heart, where you know that there should be something more, where you know that there is something more, where there is that desire for eternity.

And it's such a burden because you can't enjoy it here. And yet it is the very thing that propels us through this burden of time that we live with.

[15 : 57] We're not made for time. We were never made for time. We were never made for time to pass. We were always made for eternity.

And sin introduced time as it introduced death. That's when that became a reality. We live in a fallen world where the burdens of the world become the things that we carry.

And yet in our heart, we know that God didn't make us that way. And he has set eternity in our heart to be a constant burden of that truth.

Well, what does this mean in terms of our relationship with God? And what does it mean when we consider that God dwells with man? Well, right from the very beginning, I want to point out that God walked with Adam in the garden.

That God was where man was. God was where man was. Right from the very beginning, Adam enjoyed God's fellowship where Adam was, the place where God made him.

[17:02] And God walked with Adam in the garden. Now, if it were that God was to dwell with Adam where he was, then God wouldn't have made him on earth. He would have made him in the heavens.

But he didn't. God made Adam from the dust of the ground and then walked with him in this world. And as he did so, Adam enjoyed, at least temporarily, unhindered fellowship with God before sin entered into the world.

But then it became obscured. Then it became ruined. Then it became lost through the beginning of sin. And that's where the struggle begins.

Because from that day on, no person ever from that point enjoyed unhindered fellowship with God. And so what you end up with is you end up with people with a deep sense of eternity in their heart, living in a fallen world.

And of course, when you put those two together, everybody wants to leave. Nobody wants to stay in a bad place. We all want to leave. And in one sense, you are all going to leave.

[18:13] But it's being clear on where you're going. And you're going into the future that God has prepared. And whatever future that is, whenever it comes, that is the place where God will dwell with you.

Revelation 21. The dwelling place of God is with man. And so the picture that we have, and this might ease the tension a little bit, is one where the house is being done up around you while you're still living in it.

That's the picture of scripture. That's the picture of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. We're living in the house while God's doing it up.

And we're going, is it ever going to get tidy? Is it ever going to be what it ought to be? Okay? Is it ever going to get to that place where we're going to enjoy the unhindered fellowship with God?

Or are we constantly going to be in this mess? And yet what God is doing is he's saying, look, my will is being done on earth as it is in heaven. What you need to realize is the house is being done up around you.

[19:21] Okay? The reason you're dealing with some of the mess that you have to is because of the type of work that's going on. So the very truth of what God is doing permeates our understanding, or at least it should, that we deal with some of the issues that we have because God is at work.

Because God is rearranging the world. He is setting it free from his corruption. He is giving us the architectural plans, that is, the books of the future, and saying, this is what it'll be like.

And that work, God's will in heaven, is being done on earth. And Jesus actually called us to pray for it. Lord, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As it is up there, can it be so down here?

Why? Because God's dwelling place is going to be where man is. Now, what this world will look like in the new earth, the new heavens and the new earth, I'm not entirely sure.

But I know it is the place that God will dwell with man. God's word and his work is being completed in us and in this world.

[20:33] It'll pass. Everything that is corrupted will pass away and will be no more. Is there a picture of this elsewhere? Other than creation? Of course. You take the tabernacle.

When Moses was given instructions to build the tabernacle, we're told in Acts that he had a pattern to follow. That God gave him the architectural drawings and Moses had to get to work.

The drawings came from God and the building took place in this world. The drawings came from heaven, but the actual place, the tabernacle, was erected in the earth, on the earth.

Stones, materials, gold, all of these things were then used to build the tabernacle of which God would then dwell.

And we're told in scripture that when the tabernacle was finished, that the glory of the Lord filled it. That God, what did he do? He entered into the very place that was prepared for him so that he could dwell with his people.

[21 : 35] What's happening? Well, you're getting the same picture that you had in creation. That all of a sudden, God's people, having been redeemed from Egypt, having been redeemed at a bondage and slavery, have got nowhere to live and God said, I'm going to give you a promised land, but before we get there and before we get to the temple, I'm going to give you a tabernacle so that I can dwell with you.

Eventually, when they do get into the promised land and God says, I want a more permanent house, I want a temple and Solomon is the one who builds the temple, what do we have a picture of? We have God's people in God's place, living under God's rule, receiving God's blessing because God is there.

If that's not a picture of creation, I don't know what it is. Creation was God's people living in God's place, living under God's rule, enjoying God's blessings and the promised land was simply a new picture of that, that God was beginning to make things new all over again.

What is the church? Well, it's God's people in God's place, under God's rule, receiving God's blessings, where his presence is in the very people themselves.

Over and over and over again, the picture of God dwelling with man is reflected through the whole of Scripture, in creation, in the tabernacle, in the temple, in the church, and of course, in the future.

[23 : 11] The world is not yet ready for God to come. The world is not yet ready for God to dwell unhindered with his people, and the people themselves are not yet ready to deal with God, to enjoy God's presence in an unhindered world.

More things have to be made new. And so we look at this world and go, well, everything has to be made new. We need someone to come who can make all things new. We need someone who can make people new.

We need someone who can make the world new. And then we look at Jesus and forget that that's the very thing that he did. He says that he came to make all things new. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The old is gone and the new has come. Everything is being made new in Christ Jesus. The house is being done up while we're still living in it. God is at work.

God's will in heaven is being done on earth. That as it is in heaven, so it will be on earth. That Jesus, the creator and the sustainer, is bringing these realities down to us, showing us what the future will be.

[24 : 27] Everything is a reflection of what the future will be. And that's our role as a church, simply to understand and reflect that beauty.

And admit, we're not there yet. We still live in a mess. But we live in a mess in the same way we live in a mess when the house is being done up around us. Okay? Just because it's a mess now doesn't mean that it's going to get worse.

Okay? But that's often the way people think. If it's messy now, it's always going to be messy. If it's bad now, it can only get worse. But that kind of picture is to leave the very end picture out.

That that's not the way it's going to be. So, how do we deal with the confusing of our senses? Well, number one, the world is not what it's meant to be.

But the world is going to be what it ought to be. Because God's will on earth is being done as it is in heaven. And so, it's not surprising to find people, Christians down here, not wanting to be here.

[25 : 34] I don't want to be here either. I don't want to live in a world like this. And that sense is a good sense. That sense of dissatisfaction is the type of thing you ought to be living with.

But at the same time, you ought to be enjoying the fact of the future as being reflected through the present. The church in a good state. The church as it ought to be is a taste of heaven.

The church's worship of God as it ought to be is a taste of the things to come. And what happens is when we dilute that or we try and come up with our own interpretation, artistic interpretation of it, instead of reflecting it, we lose sight of the future.

We lose sight of the future almost entirely to the point we don't know exactly what's going to happen in the future. But all the way through scripture, God's been telling us.

All the way through scripture, it's always been about God's people on earth reflecting what will be to come. And so we live with this sense of not wanting to be here. We live with the sense of eternity

being in our heart and knowing that we're not made for time.

[26 : 46] We live with the sense of recognizing that we live in a house while it's being done up around us. And none of this we can grasp. And so what we end up feeling like is that we want to leave while God has told us he's planning his return.

God's coming back and we're all wanting to go. And that doesn't make any sense. And so the thing that we ought to settle with is this, that God has been demonstrating right from the very beginning that he wants to be where we are.

The garden, the tabernacle, the temple, the incarnation in Christ Jesus, us now in the church. And whatever the future world looks like and the new heavens and the new earth, whatever that looks like, we will be there.

And God tells us that's where he will be because the dwelling place of God is with us. We have an incredible future ahead of us. That the burden is that it could be so far ahead of us that we may have to wait an awful long time before we get to see it and enjoy it.

But it is there and it is coming. So here's the exhortation. Paul teaches us in Corinthians this, that what is true of the future will be partly true of the present because God is at work.

[28 : 10] God's will, which is in heaven, is being done on earth. So whatever is true of the future will be partly true of the present. Which means that whatever will be true of you in the future will be partly true of you now.

Are you eternal? Well, you are in Christ Jesus. Will you still die? Well, your body will, but you won't. What will be true of you then is true of you now.

Why? Because God's will as it's done in heaven is also being done on earth. This means that we are to reflect rather than to copy. We are to reflect rather than try and imitate.

We are to reflect the future through the worship of God in his church through our own lives. We're not trying to come up with our interpretation of it.

We're simply to be in the right place and reflect what God has done. One of the things that we learn then is this, that we are not to forget ever that we are made in God's image.

[29 : 11] We are the very reflection of God himself. And we recognize that we're not a perfect reflection. But we also recognize that the longer we are a Christian, that the more we continue to walk with God, the more God continues to walk with us and take us with him, the more we become like Jesus.

And therefore, the better reflection of God we will be. Our very life is a testimony to the fact that we are to reflect God to those around us and to those in the world.

So here's the conclusion. there is a difference, a big difference, between not knowing where you're going and not knowing that you're not there yet. There's a big difference there.

You may not be too sure about what the future is going to look like. You may not be too sure about where it is you're exactly going. But what you are sure about is that you're not there yet.

And you know you're not there yet because of the deep sense of eternity that God has put in your heart. Okay? You may not know what that future is going to be like but you know this isn't it.

[30 : 20] And the reason you know this isn't it is because of the troubles and the hindered fellowship that we have with God because of the sin that we have to put up with. Remember, the heavens declare the glory of God.

The sky proclaims his handiwork. Creation speaks about God everywhere. Moses was given a pattern to make the tabernacle according to the architectural drawings that God gave him.

God walked with Adam in the garden. Over and over again God's dwelling place is with man.

Everything proclaims God.

The heavens, the sky, the tabernacle, the temple, creation, Adam, us, each other to each other.

The kingdom of God. God, everything is a reflection of what will be.

But everything is a poor reflection because we're not there yet. We are reflecting something that is true but we're reflecting it in the world that is full of sin.

[31 : 21] It is a dirty image in many ways that God is about cleaning. So we live with this burden and it's a heavy burden. And the burden is that in our hearts we know that we are made for eternity.

That in our hearts we know that there's more than this. That in our hearts that we know that we are made for eternity and not for time. And God has given us that burden purposely so that we would live with it.

It's not about so much what the future will be. It's not so much about whether or not we're there yet. It is about reflecting what will be true. And most importantly, if we don't know what worship looks like in heaven now, we have no idea how to reflect it down here on earth. If we have no idea what the beauty of glory looks like in the future, then there's absolutely no way we can reflect it down here now. So the burden is twofold. We live with the sense that we're not there yet, but at the same time we have a duty before God to reflect the truth of what will be. That we're not made for time, but for eternity. [32 : 33] And God will one day dwell with man in an unhindered fellowship. And for that, we give God all the praise. Amen.