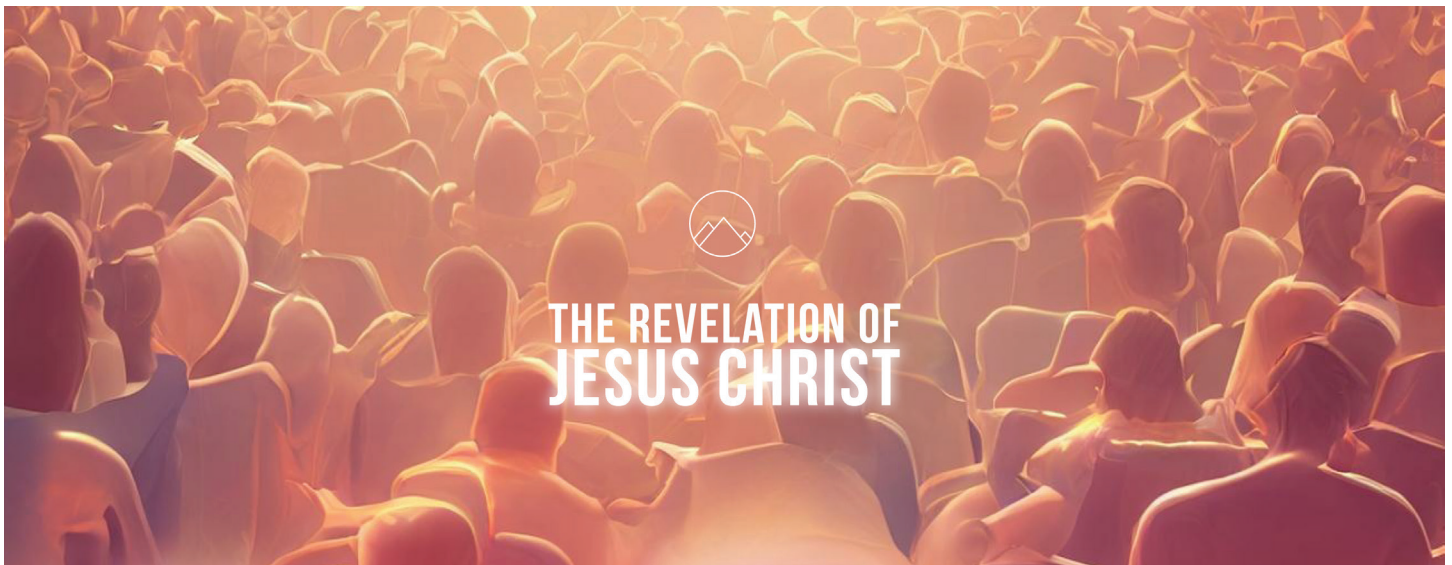




Sunday, June 9, 2024
Revelation 21

As we step into the last two messages on the Book of Revelation, these are two messages that should encourage incredible hope in the life of believers.

Revelation 21:1-27

'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. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 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. 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."

5 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."

6 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. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 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."

The New Jerusalem

9 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." 10 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, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. 17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. 18 The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

The Glory of the New Jerusalem

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Now, as far as the book of Revelation is concerned, these next two chapters put an emphatic hope on a book that has historically been full of consequence and judgment. It hasn't been easy to walk through the nature of the judgment of God, but it has been necessary.

We've learned that God is a righteous judge and every action that He takes is therefore ALWAYS correct, lawful and just. He simply cannot operate outside of the parameters of righteousness. We've seen the introduction of Jesus Christ as warrior, then the warnings to the seven churches to stay the course.

We've seen a picture of the three sets of judgements from God - reminding us that although His judgment is positioned towards sin, it must be understood that His heart is for redemption and that He always gives options for hearts to turn back to Him.

We've seen the picture of the planetarium showing pictures and images of time past, present and future as we were introduced to Satan as the dragon and then the beast of the sea and the beast of the earth who do his dirty work on the earth while he is locked up in chains.

We've learned that, even though it seems that evil has had its day, this is simply not true, for the victory of Jesus Christ was not fought and won in the battle of Armageddon, rather it was fought and won on the cross, where He died for our sins, and then defeated death and Hades through His resurrection. And as such, the battle of Armageddon isn't really a battle at all, it is better viewed as a round up of evil, where He takes the two beasts and then the dragon and throws them into the lake of fire, which burns for eternity. And once this final act of judgement takes place, sin, death and evil will be eradicated for all eternity.

And it is now in their absence that God creates a new heaven and a new earth.

Which if you really think about it this is a beautiful full circle moment. It is here where we finally see the culmination of thousands upon thousands of years of strategy since the fall of Genesis 3. It's a rebirth moment for creation - a Genesis-reborn moment as the Lord now recreates and redeems all of creation as He promised He would all throughout the Scriptures. And to be there in that moment will be absolutely incredible. Words will not be able to describe the wonder, amazement and awe that this moment will behold.

Nevertheless, as John witnesses this vision, words are all he has to use to try and describe the beauty before him. And the first thing we learn is that in the same verse as the creation of the new heaven and new earth, John also makes it clear to us that the sea before the throne is no longer present in the new creation. Which is an important detail to note here.

You see, when we are first introduced to the the throne-room scene in Chapter 4, John talks about this massive sea of glass positioned before the throne and says:

Revelation 4:10

'Before the throne there was (something like) a sea of glass, like crystal.'

To you and me, this is a wondrous introduction to the stunning beauty of the sea before the throne, whose purpose was to reflect the glory and nature of God, stretching as far and wide as the eye could see. While this image inspires awe and amazement, it's crucial to understand that in reflecting God's glory and perfection, the sea also served as a barrier to the Presence of God. It was a reminder of the impossible separation between God and His creation. Due to our sinful state, being in the presence of God and surviving was literally impossible.

We see this all throughout the Old Testament: when God wanted to present Himself to Moses, He shielded His presence with a cloud and smoke; He also instructed him to hide his face in the cleft of a rock while He passed by; Elijah emerged from the cave he was hiding in with his face wrapped in his cloak to shield himself from the overwhelming presence of God; and with the ark of the covenant, people died if they even touched it. The sea before the throne was yet another reminder of just how unapproachable God was for humanity.

But through Jesus Christ, the way to the Father was made clear through the cross so we can now

approach the throne through Grace. But in the new heaven and new earth however, there is no longer any need for a sea to act as a barrier between God and humanity or to reflect the glory and purity of God, because the new humanity now is with God eternally and can reflect His glory and purity in ways that the sea never could.

Now, in addition to the sea not being present in the new creation, if you read carefully, you will notice that there are a number of other omissions here as well.

Vs. 4 says that in the new creation God will wipe every tear from our eyes and that there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. Although this sounds great and is certainly something to look forward to, it is impossible to grasp in our finite state. Our minds simply cannot understand this. We live in a world that is full of sorrow, pain and tears. This has become the norm. It is to be expected. When the Leafs lose in the opening round of the playoffs we cry even though we expected it. When someone cuts you off on the highway, you feel the temperature rising in your face. When you step on your kids lego for the 47th time, you hop up and down and bite your lip for fear of screaming something you probably shouldn't. When dogs die, we cry. When cats die....well..... When we watch someone suffer through illness, it breaks our heart. When loved ones pass away, we grieve. And so on and so forth. But in heaven, there will be no crying, no blow-ups, no pain and no tears, because there will be no death. For ever.....and ever.....and ever.....

...and if you let that thought grab you too long it can mess with your head a little bit. As a kid I would try to picture this and my mind would go to the end of time and after repeating about a dozen "forever and ever's" about a billion years worth, I came to the realization that this was just a drop in the bucket of time and when that bucket had been filled up with drops that each represented a billion years, it would go to the next bucket. And that bucket would join other buckets in the skies like stars. And when those buckets of billions and billions of years had filled up the galaxies, that was just a drop in another bucket of eternity.....because it just doesn't stop....and that thought would always leave me feeling anxious and panicked because my mind can't comprehend it. And even though eternity is a good thing, because my mind can't comprehend it, it automatically views it as bad because we don't know of anything at this present state that doesn't have an end. But we have to understand that even though we can't comprehend or understand eternity, it is a very good thing and we can trust God that we are not ever going to want it to end.

Which raises a question: if someone has a loved one who is not present in heaven with them, how does this eternity of no pain or sorrow now apply to them?

There seem to be three main options for this:

1. We forget them. In His grace and mercy, God wipes our minds clean at the transformation of our bodies so we don't remember them. This can be challenging though because Scripture doesn't even hint at something like this.
2. Because at this point we will now know good and evil like God does, then we can view this as just, correct and lawful just like He does, so it won't affect us as such. The challenge is that even though

this is true, seeing something like this as correct, lawful and just doesn't necessarily mean that it won't be sad or sorrowful.

3. They will cease to exist. This idea suggests that verses like John 3:16 teach us that the consequence of those that reject salvation is death - which means to cease to exist. When all those that have rejected salvation are thrown into the lake of fire, it is important to note that it clearly says that the lake of fire burns for eternity as do the dragon and the beasts, but it doesn't specifically say anyone else. The idea here is that in God's grace and mercy, His punishment for those that rejected salvation is eternal separation from Him through annihilation - that they would simply cease to exist. The challenge with this is that the Bible just isn't clear on this and some of the supporting verses can be taken either way.

So, if you're asking me, I'm comfortable saying that I simply do not know. I think each one of these potential answers poses some challenges in their own right so I'm comfortable just trusting Jesus at His words. So, when He says that there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow, I don't need to know how it all works together I just need to know that it does. And that right there should be enough to establish trust and hope that this will truly be the case.

The next thing that we notice is the construction of the new city and in verse 22 we read that there is no temple in the new city of Jerusalem. This is interesting because historically and prophetically, the temple has always been central to the relationship between God and His people. In the Old Testament, the temple was the physical location where God's presence dwelled among the Israelites, which made it the focal point of any kind of connection with God.

When the temple was destroyed the prophet Ezekiel received a vision of a restored temple which symbolized the hope and the future return of God's presence to a purified and renewed Israel. However, instead of a temple of brick and mortar, in the New Testament, there was a new temple formed and that was us. As the Apostle Paul so eloquently put it, we became the temple of the Holy Spirit upon salvation. Now all humanity - not just Israel - could connect with the presence of the Almighty in a more intimate and personal way, as the Presence of God was now always accessible. This absence of a brick and mortar temple signified a profound shift in how God's presence was to be experienced by His people. But that shift will not be fully realized until we are in the New Heaven and the New Earth where the temple won't be brick and mortar - nor will it be us - for as verse 22 says, '...the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.'

This tells us that in the new creation worship is no longer about going to a specific place, but now about living in the unbroken presence of God in which we have now entered into. Which if you really think about it, makes a whole lot more sense. We now enter into the presence of God and we make our dwelling place now in Him instead of the other way around. His presence literally fills up the new heavens and the new earth so as we enter into eternity, we are entering into Him.

Vs. 23 follows up that thought by letting us know that there is now no longer any need for the sun or the moon as the light of the Lamb is our light. Suggesting perhaps, that there will be no more

separation between night and day but that the glory of God will provide constant and unending illumination, eliminating any darkness or shadows. This represents yet another profound shift from our current experience of time and light cycles to an existence where God's glory forever shines, filling every moment with His presence and making every aspect of life an act of worship and communion with Him.

Vs. 25 says that the gates will not be shut nor will they be locked. In first century culture, there were massive gates to a city that would always be shut and locked and guarded at night for the sake of protection. Since there is no night anymore, nor is there any evil, there is therefore now no need for the gates to even be shut, let alone locked. After all, there is no longer any danger or threat, and certainly no barriers to accessing God's presence for anyone.

There's a second tidbit of information given about these gates here as well. If you go back with me to verse 12, we can see that they are named after the 12 tribes of Israel. What does this mean? Do our Jewish forefathers get special entrance in the new Heaven and new Earth? Nope, like much of the book of Revelation, this is a highly symbolic. By inscribing their names on the gates, it serves as a very clear reminder that their place in history will always be significant because they were the people to provide the bloodline for the Messiah to come. The entrance into Heaven will always be through Jesus Christ and by naming the gates after the 12 tribes it's a reminder that the purpose of the Jewish people was to be the bloodline for Jesus and that their purpose was complete and fulfilled.

And so, as I see it, the names of the 12 tribes being placed as pearls on the gates actually serve to highlight the unity of all of God's people not to just Israel of old. You see, the New Jerusalem is not exclusively for one group but includes all who have come to faith, both Jews and Gentiles. Note verse 14, which now speaks of the foundation stones being named after the 12 apostles. Here we see a clear distinction between the roles of the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament, which shows the complete unity of God's people from both the Old and New Covenants. The gates symbolize the entry point into God's covenant community through Israel being the bloodline for the Messiah and the foundation stones symbolize the establishment and stability of the Church, built on the teachings of Jesus.

Together, this imagery represents the unity and continuity of God's redemptive history, bringing together all who belong to Him into one eternally connected community: a place where every believer, regardless of their background, is welcomed into His eternal presence forever and ever.

And the final omission is that of any kind of evil or sin. Remember, death and Hades and all of its hordes are now in the lake of fire, which will burn for eternity. There is no more evil. No more temptation. No more sinful thoughts or actions or desires.

2 things to consider as I close:

1. How you view the future will inform how you live in the present. As Christians, this should motivate us to prepare ourselves as the bride for the bridegroom. We take this life seriously and do everything we can to prepare.

2. He's making all things new. Not, he's going to make all things new. It's present-tense. He is doing it now. He's doing it with you and He's doing it with me. Would you make me anew oh God. Would you create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me, oh God?

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

<https://www.facebook.com/KingsviewCommunityChurch/>