

Revelation 21-22

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[0 : 00] So, in a few weeks' time, I mentioned we'll be beginning a series in the evening service on the shape of the Psalms and how our worship is, in fact, the greatest impetus for our work here on earth.

It's through our worship of the Lord and His anointed one, Jesus Christ, that we are driven into the world to bring God's Word to bear on it.

But before we get to that, I thought it would be worth pausing for a moment to consider the end of God's story, finding in its contents, the contents of this vision of heaven on earth, our reason for worship, that we would worship God now in every aspect of our lives.

And though it's often been quipped that, in the past, that the more heavenly-minded you become, the less earthly good you grow to be.

Today, we're going to adopt the perspective of C.S. Lewis. He said these words, If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next, who fixed their eyes on the world to come.

[1 : 29] The apostles themselves who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven.

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

And Lord willing, as we turn to think of the other world, the world that is to come, we will find our effectiveness in this world renewed.

As we look at our text, we will find that Eternity's city is painted in three pictures of places once lost to the people of God that will then be regained.

Jerusalem, the temple, and Eden, paradise itself. First, Jerusalem regained, the city of renewal.

[2 : 44] After 400 years of slavery in Egypt, the nation of Israel would have seen in the promised land the place where God would make his dwelling among them.

God would dwell no longer in a tent as his people wandered through the wilderness, but as they were brought in to dwell in permanence, so too he would dwell permanently in the capital of the land, Jerusalem, the city of the great king, a symbol of God's faithfulness to his people and to their abiding peace, where God would put his name.

The promised land and its capital, though, were eventually lost as the Israelites strayed from the Lord. Their entrance into the promised land was conditioned on their walking in the ways of the Lord, remembering that it was he by his mighty hand that brought them into the land in the first place.

Yet they forgot this truth and they wandered from him. Jerusalem was lost with the land.

And the people were sent into exile. And even when the people someday returned to the land, it was not what it had once been.

- [4 : 14] It was not what it was supposed to be. And there began to be a current running beneath the surface in their prophetic streams.
- A current that looked forward to a future restoration of the great city, someday between history and eternity.
- The language of that current is picked up here as John describes what he saw of the new heavens and new earth in terms of a new Jerusalem.
- One back not because of man's keeping of the ways of God, but rather one back by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb.
- John sees in verse 1, a new heaven and a new earth. And in verse 2, the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.
- [5 : 16] Where for all of history, God had been up there. Now heaven and earth become one. And in heaven's city, God and his people dwell together as at no other time.
- With the new Jerusalem, there isn't even any distinction between the land and its capital, as there had been in the past. There is no time at which the people of God would say, Today I go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, to celebrate the feasts, to worship God.
- Now there is no distinction between the place of life and the place of worship. This is most clearly seen in the fact that the city is described, It's described as both the place to dwell and the people who dwell there.
- It is the holy city, yes, but also prepared as a bride. As the bride of Christ, the people of God, made of Jew and Gentile, who have believed in him for salvation.
- Both people and place. The closest picture we can imagine to what heaven will be like is home. The longing for home rests in each of our hearts in the profoundest of ways.
- [6 : 46] Home is the place we get sick for. Home cooking is the food that we hunger for. Home coming is the day that we look forward to.
- But while home is nothing less than a place, it is also much more. Home is the place where loved ones are found.
- If one has just a house and no communion with family and friends, one has no home. If one has only communion but no place to return to, at the end of the day, one is homeless.
- The beautiful thing about the New Jerusalem is that it is both people and place. The place is so defined by who is there that the two aspects cannot be separated.
- Whereas the earthly Jerusalem would lie desolate when its people were exiled, the heavenly Jerusalem cannot even be described apart from the people who will dwell there.
- [7 : 54] If the people weren't there, its identity would be lost. People and place. Yet the city is not just any old home.
- It is the home of God, perfected by his presence. As it says in verses 3 and 4, 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, because he is there, every tear from their eyes.
- And death shall be no more, and neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain. I was talking with one of the moms the other day from Little Lambs.
- She's been here a year, and they're just about to move back to Hungary to spend a couple months at her parents' living there. But she was telling me that over the past year here in Aberdeen, because of some work issues with her husband, her husband and her have moved seven times.
- [9 : 08] Seven times in the last year. And each time she's tried to turn their short-term rental into a home. So she's swept and mopped.

She's scrubbed and scoured the kitchen, the living room, the bathroom, the bedrooms. She's even got up and cleaned the top shelf of the closets, and back behind the refrigerator and in the creases of the radiators.

She's tried, hard as she might, to perfect her home by her presence, to make it home.

My mom once said, and I've said this before, I think it's a great quote, one of the many that my mom has come up with, that a home is not your home until you've touched every corner.

The city that is to come will not be a city with holes in the walls or dusty closets or filthy radiators.

[10 : 20] What's more, it won't be a city of broken people, sin-sick with disease and disobedience and death. In God's city, where he sets up home among his people, he will have touched every corner.

The city will be perfected by his presence as both a people and a place. Verses 5 to 8, though, make clear that not everyone will, in the words of verse 7, have this heritage, this city of God.

There will be those who persevere in the faith, putting their trust in God over the things of this world, the suffering of this world, the cracked goggles, will be for them, not the breaking point of faith, but the making of faith.

Those who don't back down in the face of evil, who don't denounce Jesus in the face of hardship, and will be rewarded in the face of God at the close of this age.

But there will also be those who don't live out their faith by denying the Jesus they once believed in or supposed to believe in. And there will also be those who reject him to begin with.

[11 : 50] And while there are three kinds of people in this world, those who remain faithful, those who turn back from whatever faith they may have tasted, and those who never turn to the faith in the first place, there are only two places, we're told, to spend eternity.

This eternal city, or an eternal fire. It's a warning that is for all of us here today.

If you have not trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, the only one able to make things right in your life, today ought to be for you the day of salvation.

If you have done so already, though, and put your faith in Christ, and are continuing to grow in your faith, you can be encouraged at what lies ahead.

That no matter how bad life gets, how hard it gets, how bad the crack in your goggles might be, how much water is pouring into your eyes, you have a home awaiting you where God himself will be your God, and as verse 7 concludes, where you will be his child.

[13 : 16] If you once trusted in the Lord, but have now since lost sight of that great hope, if you have turned from what you once knew to be true, now is the time to renew your relationship to Christ.

The city that is to come is first and foremost the new Jerusalem, the city of renewal, the people of God dwelling in the place of God, perfected by his presence.

Yet the city that is to come is more than just Jerusalem regained, it is also the temple regained, which over renewal characterizes this city as a city of purity.

Where Jerusalem was to be the capital of the promised land, what made the city so important was that there was the temple there. The temple of the Lord was built in that city.

When God's people came into the permanence of the promised land, God too moved in from going about in a tent known as the tabernacle to resting in the permanent structure of the temple where he would be in the midst of his people as he dwelt with them in his land.

[14 : 43] Yet the temple was destroyed when the city was taken by the henchmen of Nebuchadnezzar and burned to the ground while its people were taken into exile.

And even when the temple was later rebuilt, when the people returned to their land, the old men who remembered the glory of the first temple were told could only weep at the lack of glory of the new temple.

But here, but here in this city that is to come though, John sees not only a new Jerusalem but also the temple, the temple restored where the distinction between us out here and capital of the promised land over there has been abolished.

Now the distinction between us out here and God in there in the temple is abolished as well. brought to a mountain to watch the city descend, John sees the city of God in verse 11 shining with God's glory.

And in verse 12 he sees that on the gates of the city were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel where the earthly temple had only one gate, one way in, one way out.

[16 : 09] The heavenly temple city has twelve gates facing in all directions access given to the whole earth through the nation of Israel. The blessing promised to Abraham lived out where all nations would be blessed through him, through his offspring.

It's so significant and although one doesn't need to become Jewish to enter the city, the temple, still one must enter in some sense through Israel and so far as through it God has ushered in the redemption made possible by his son.

And along with the twelve gates through which we enter the city, the twelve gates of the twelve tribes. Verse 14 speaks of its twelve foundations inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Where access to the holy city is gained through the twelve tribes of Israel, it is founded on the apostles of the Lamb as they, through their witness and teaching, have focused God's redemptive acts in history around Christ.

Christ, they have reinterpreted for us the entire story and shown us a right that Jesus is at the center.

[17 : 47] Entrance through the twelve tribes but founded on the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And we have their witness in Scripture to learn John.

John goes on to describe how the city was laid out though in verse 16, speaking of it lying as a square with the angel measuring the city and finding it to be twelve thousand stadia in length.

Its length and width and height are equal, a perfect cube. Each side of the city would stretch halfway across the United States but more importantly the city of the great king was as big as the Roman Empire which in John's day stood in direct opposition to God's kingly reign.

It was the empire that sent John to Patmos in the first place. It was the empire that had pitted itself against everything God stood for.

Within that empire allegiance was demanded from every citizen to bend the knee to Caesar as God but for a Christian to do so for a believer to do so would have been to cower in the face of uncertainty and to give up trust in the Lord.

[19 : 14] It's not too different from today. Here the vision of God's city casts though a dim shadow over the glory of any form of earthly government, Roman Empire or otherwise any government that we might fear or pledge allegiance to above our heavenly home and its king.

Twelve thousand stadia, the city that is to come will trump all earthly powers whether presidents or parliaments, queen or country.

And that John sees the city as a cube. Don't miss this. That he sees the city as a cube points us to the innermost part of the temple.

Only it's nearly a thousand times its size. The only other cube mentioned in the entire Bible was the holy of holies.

Fifteen by fifteen by fifteen. A perfect cube that had been separated from the people by a veil the size of one's hand in width and by a courtyard after courtyard after courtyard where God himself dwelt above the ark of the government in there and we were not allowed to go.

[20 : 47] now the city where the perfected saints dwell is pictured as the holy of holies itself where they will someday dwell with God and there will be no distinction between priest and commoner where God will dwell in our midst and we will be his holy people.

This temple city will be characterized by holiness glory and purity. When John sees no temple it is because the presence of God is in the midst of the city such that it can be said in verse 22 for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the lamb.

No longer is there any distinction between the holy and the mundane. The only distinction to remain in eternity is between God himself and us his people. Our home will be his home and where we live there we will worship as well.

It will be a holy place. To that place verse 24 speaks of the city being lit by the glory of God and of the lamb and the glory that has been given to the nations will be brought back to the rightful king.

The glory that we humans have mistakenly attributed to kings and prime ministers and politicians will be given back to the one true God. In that place glory will return to its rightful owner.

[22 : 12] And in that place there will no longer be any impurity or danger. As verse 25 says its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there.

No night in which the forces of evil roam. No night in which danger lurks. No night in which sin is done in the shadows of life. Where each of us has struggled to make our lives a place of worship to render glory to God rather than man and to live in the light of purity rather than the darkness of sin we can be assured as followers of Christ that the day is coming when we will dwell in a place where no such trouble will remain.

The day is coming when we will live in the most holy place where for all of life we have been unable to even enter. Entrance into that place has come by way of the twelve tribes of Israel and it's founded on the teaching of the apostles and there holiness glory and purity will characterize all of life and there is where we will live.

Where Jerusalem and the temple though were places God once dwelt in structures made by man places given and lost in the course of fallen history the final picture we are given of the city that is to come is of Eden where God had dwelt in unhindered relationship with humanity before they had disobeyed and defied his ways.

The boundaries of Eden were defined by four rivers and in the new Eden verse 1 of chapter 22 says there will be one great river flowing straight down the middle of the city's main thoroughfare flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb its water will not be polluted but pure for it is the river of life.

[24 : 10] Being driven from Eden Adam and Eve were barred from the tree of life. Now on either side of the river of life verse 2 tells us that the tree of life will grow its fruit available to every citizen of the holy city and its leaves available for the healing of the nations like the gates the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham that through his offspring all the nations would be blessed through the healing of the leaves of the tree of life as they come to dine on its fruit.

Where curse reigned and humanity lost the unmediated presence of God and Adam lost his life as the servant of God tilling and tending the garden. Now in verse 3 no longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him.

They will serve him once again. Verse 4 tells us that we will see his face the face upon which Moses was not even able to look and the glory made known to men only in a veiled Jesus.

Glory set aside to take on human frailty will be seen for what it is as never before as we look on him face to face dwelling in what was once an unapproachable light as we will then be made perfect and able to bear the sight of his pure glory.

And not only will those who persevere in this life be able to serve our Lord again but in part look at the end of verse 5 we will reign with him forever and ever.

[25 : 56] We will be somehow participants in the great victory over evil the restoration of Eden and the life everlasting as co-heirs and princes and princesses of the kingdom.

In eternity those who persevere in the faith will be ushered into a place that will be promised land place of worship and paradise in one. We will not live in heaven on cloud nine with our harps and halos but on a new earth where heaven comes down and God dwells among us and life will be restored to what it was always meant to be and we will worship without end living quite literally in the light of God and holiness and glory and purity.

The question at the end of all this is what does it do for us now? What does it do for us now? And we find the answer to that in verse 8 of chapter 22.

In John's reaction it says, and when he heard and saw these visions he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me and he said to me you must not do that I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book.

Worship God. The place of worship of eternity becomes the reason to worship God now.

[27 : 35] The hope that allows us to bear through anything life has to throw at us. To worship perpetually. We worship him through temptation and testing through trials and all of life's hardships.

to worship him now through and through. Here on Sundays, yes, on the rest of the week, absolutely, without end. Worship God.

If you have seen heaven and what God will do definitively at the end of history as he closes this age, the only response you can have is to worship God with the entirety of your life, everything changes.

It changes everything. everything. Let me give you three ways it changes everything and how this could be worked into your life and then we'll finish with Psalm 121.

First, it changes how you live. You can worship, not just in this theoretical sense, but you can worship by living well. It changes the decisions.

[28 : 59] Many of us might be tired from the church walk and go home and sleep for the rest of the day, but tomorrow hopefully we will all wake up and we will have before us a thousand decisions that we need to make.

Living in light of eternity changes how we make every decision. Where we eat, what we do with our time, how we spend our money.

It changes whether or not we interact with our neighbors or seclude ourselves in our own house, comfortable. It changes what we do in our city.

It changes what we do as a church. If we are to worship, we can worship first by living well. If you play golf, it changes how you play golf or how you act with your kids.

Just quickly, I learned how to play golf in Chicago. I wasn't very good and I learned for the sole purpose of joining a friend of mine who wanted to play golf.

[30 : 08] So I learned. And it worked out tremendously because as I did terribly, I was able to demonstrate to him that golf is not my life. It's not my sole purpose.

It doesn't bear on me whether I shoot 140 or not. It doesn't matter. I don't even know if that's a good score or not. But it did that.

And as I did terribly, you know what? It took us five hours to get around a nine-hole course. And we had five hours to converse over why golf was not important to me.

And five hours, you can cover a lot of Jesus in five hours. And my buddy, he went from somebody who was completely hostile to the gospel, to being somebody who was, at the end of us leaving, Chicago was singing the praises of how God is gracious in his life.

It changes how you live and what you do with what you do. Worship, also you can worship God by suffering well. If this is true, if this picture is true, just like we talked about with the kids, cracked goggles don't mean anything anymore and practice being hard doesn't matter.

[31 : 24] Because this is not the end. You can suffer well, whether you're stubbing your toe, or your children are grating on your nerves, or you're losing a loved one to cancer or whatever it might be.

It changes everything because this is not the end. And you can suffer well and suffering can have its rightful place in your life. Not to thrust you away from God, but to drive you closer to him.

It doesn't break your faith, it makes your faith. And if this is true, you worship, you can worship him by witnessing. I get this because I'm the outreach guy.

Now, if you didn't know. You can live well, you can suffer well, but you can worship God by witnessing well. So often we shy away from witness in the name of toleration.

We might be happy to live well, but to open our mouths is totally beyond us. It's absolutely beyond us often. Keep your mouths shut because they don't want to believe it anyway is what toleration tells us.

[32 : 35] But if this is true, if this picture of heaven on earth is at all a glimpse of the beginning of eternity, the story of what God is doing ought to be ever on the tip of our tongues.

We ought to be retelling the story of the world through this lens over and over and over again, both because it's our story and because it's not yet the story of those around us.

This is just the insight from the world's perspective. Penn Gillette is a comic illustrator and avowed and vocal atheist. A book I was reading recently recounted his thoughts after being evangelized.

by what he described as a polite and impressive man. This is what he says. He says, I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who don't proselytize.

I don't respect that at all. If you don't, if you believe that there's a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, well, it's not really worth telling them because that's going to somehow make it socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody not to proselytize?

[33 : 56] How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them about it? I mean, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it and that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you and this is more important than that.

This guy's an atheist. It's an amazing statement. It makes you think, doesn't it? So if this is our picture of eternity, a new Jerusalem, a new temple, a new Eden, and it's so much more than just heaven and hell, it's so much richer and more meaningful as we live well and suffer well, we ought to at every point also witness well, interpret our actions vocally.

We interpret the world around us. People do not have good stories. They need a good story. They need someone to interpret the world they live in because they don't understand it.

There is no other answer. If this is your story, this becomes your witness. And we ought to do it as we live well and as we suffer well.

Let me just end with this. Having taken the perspective of C.S. Lewis as we began, I think it's fitting to end with his words as well. He said, concerning where we direct our focus, if you aim at heaven, you get earth thrown in.

[35 : 32] If you aim at earth, you get neither. We need to then take the perspective with heaven in view and in that sense be enabled to change the world around us.

Would you pray with me? Dear God, it is a wonder to us that you would even wait around to replant Eden after we so thoroughly ruined it.

But let it be so. for your glory and for our good and for the good of those around us as you embolden us to live well and suffer well and to witness well.

As we look to Jesus as our hope, in his name I pray. Amen. We'll finish with Psalm 121. You can stand. It's on page 168.

We'll sing verses 1 to 8 and we'll sing to the tune of Trewin. I lift up my eyes to the hills where I am I to look for my aid.

[36 : 39] My help comes to me from the Lord by whom earth and heaven were made and will be remade. Psalm 121. Please stand.

Thank you. my Lord from heaven to heaven were styled and will be moment to bring The Lord over Israel is watched, and he will not slumber or sleep.

The Lord will be watched over you, your strength will the face and the light.

The sun will not harm you by day, the moon will not harm you by night.

The Lord will protect you from harm, your life he will never defend.

[38 : 34] You will hurt every step that you take, all now and for days without end.

There will be no more night, we're told. We will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give us light on that day.

May that light dawn on your life even now, and may you walk in its light this week and forevermore. Amen. Amen.