

# Weekend @Home Pt4

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're reading this morning from Revelation, chapter 21, which is on page 1249 in the Bibles. Revelation 21, verses 1 to 5.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. This is the word of the Lord.

[ 1 : 21 ] Thank you very much. So I do keep that passage open. The plan that I've been doing yesterday and today, this is the third of three talks.

And this will be helpful if you've not heard any of the other three. But what we've been doing is we've been looking at Revelation 21, verses 1 for the first talk, verse 2 for the second, and 3 for today. The first one was about the new heaven and the new earth.

So about the place. That heaven isn't just a kind of a floaty, floaty thing in the clouds. That's spiritual and ethereal like ghosts. But it's the earth uncursed.

As it should be. Very, very good. It's real physical existence. And then in the second talk, when we looked at verse 2, we thought not just about the place, but the people.

Those are all Ps. The people, what we'll be like. And we looked at the bride there. And how we will have physical bodies. And bodies that are strong and eternal and without suffering and death.

[ 2 : 24 ] And how society will be totally different, transformed. Because everyone's hearts will be transformed. Everyone will love each other more than they love themselves. And it will be a wonderful, wonderful, constructive, positive society.

As it ought to be. But isn't. Without the failings, without the curse, without the sin of today's society. But we, in that second talk, we looked at this idea of the bride.

And let me just read verse 2. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem. That's us. Not the place, but the people. Coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And we talked about the wedding. You know that moment at the beginning of a wedding. When the bride comes along the aisle. And she walks really, really slowly. And everyone's watching her. And there's a big smile on her face.

It's the loveliest part of the wedding. But the thing about that moment in that wedding. As the bride comes along. Everyone's looking at her.

[ 3 : 22 ] Doesn't she look beautiful? Isn't this fun? Really? I mean, she might be looking at all the people. But really, she's only got eyes in one direction. And that's right to the front. Because right at the front is the man.

Stood there. He's just looking at her. What have I... Look at her. I'm marrying her. Her eyes are really on him. And his eyes are totally transfixed by her.

I remember doing it. I just thought, wow. I'm so excited. Because a wedding. It's great to watch it. But that... That... As she comes down. It's really about those two people.

And that's what it's about. And I think that's what verse 2 is all about. It's about that wedding. About how God and his people are going to come together and be one. Heaven and earth are separate at

the moment.

But they will become one. And if... If that's what verse 2 is alluding to. Verse 3. It's about the marriage. It's about moving into the marital home. So have a look at verse 3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look.

[ 4 : 25 ] God's dwelling place is now among the people. And he will dwell with them. And they will be his people.

And God himself will be with them and be their God. There's that moment in a wedding, isn't it? Where you say, Do you take this woman to be your wife and this man to be your husband? Do you take this God to be your God?

And God, do you take this people to be your people? And he will dwell with them. And live with them forevermore. Moving into the marital home. This is the marriage. And on. And that's what we're thinking about today.

We're thinking about the presence. There's our three Ps. God's presence. What will it be like to live forever in God's presence? The banner verse that I was using yesterday comes from Ephesians 1. This idea that we have eyes in our hearts. To see and understand heaven better. To not just understand it with our heads. But to love it in our hearts.

[ 5 : 23 ] And to see it. And to thirst for it. And long for it. What will it be like to be married to God? That sounds really weird. Particularly for a man, I think. What is that about?

Well, that's what we're thinking about today. Three points today. And the first one is God with us. If you can then just scroll us on for a couple of slides. To the next one. That's there, Greg.

God with us. Here's the thing. Heaven is heaven because God is with us. Many people have this view of heaven.

The way, if I said to you what you imagine heaven like. What they essentially do is they take their favorite hedonistic fantasy about life. And imagine it as an endless version of that. Heaven will be endless ski slopes that just go on and on and on.

Heaven will be the most amazing surf with the perfect waves. And you can just surf all day. Heaven will be a big chair that's very comfortable with all my favorite food and drink.

[ 6 : 23 ] And I can just sit and read the newspaper for the rest of forever. I don't know. What is your favorite fantasy? That's what many people imagine heaven to be like. It's not actually massively different to the Islamic view of heaven.

You know the 72 virgins feeding you grapes for the rest of forever. Heaven will be a wonderful place. It will be lots of fun. Don't get me wrong. It's not dull.

It's not a suppression of fun. It's the ultimate in fun. It's the place of abundance and joy and righteousness. It's life to the full. Real life. But the reason heaven is the way it is, is because God is there.

The reason the room is lit up, is because the light is on. The reason heaven is this place of joy and abundance and joy, is because God is at the center of it. He's the centerpiece.

It's about him. Have a look again at Revelation 22 actually. Just turn over the page. Let me read from verse 1 of 22.

[ 7 : 25 ] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city.

All of this is metaphor. So there's God, the Father and the Son, God and the Lamb, and they have a throne in the middle of the city because he's amongst the people. And there's this great river that flows from their throne.

Their throne, it looks like a leak, doesn't it? And what this water is, is the water of life. Whoever drinks from this will never thirst and live forever, have eternal life. And on the banks of the rivers, well on each side of the river, middle of verse 2, stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. The tree of life, which was in the Garden of Eden that Adam ate from, that he had eternal life and was banished from. Now we eat from that.

We live forever and the leaves are for the healing of the nations. The reason this place is a place of life to the full is because it comes from the throne of God. It's because God is there in the middle.

[ 8 : 28 ] No longer will there be any curse, verse 3. That's the big idea of heaven. It's not perfection as such. It's curselessness. It's everything made right again. And the throne of God and of the

Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him.

I think this is my favorite verse, verse 4. And we've just been singing it. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. Owned by God.

Married to God. Belonging to God. There will be no more night. This is metaphor, right? I don't know if there's night or day, but it's metaphor.

Because they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun. For the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever. Just as wherever you go in the daytime, the sun is always there.

Wherever you are, the sun is there and it dominates everything.

It's amazing, isn't it? One light lights up everything. And there God is amongst us. And his glory gives light to everything.

[ 9 : 30 ] There's a silly thing that I like, meditation of mine. And you've got it this morning. You know how brilliant, isn't it, when you come out and it's really sunny? And everything has more color, doesn't it?

Everything has more color. Even in the middle of the winter, when it's freezing cold, when the sun is out, it can be totally beautiful, can't it? Because the sun just, it brings color out in everything.

Imagine what it would like to look at that same tree.

When it's based not just in the sun, which is quite nice, but with the glory of God, which is the real thing. The sun, God has given us the sun and the moon. Just as a picture to understand what it would be like to live in the presence of God.

Just like we live in the presence of the sun. But it would be God there amongst us. And we'll see his face. Now you could argue from one point of view that actually the whole story of the Bible is the story of God wanting to be with us, but not.

God made Adam and Eve. He put them in the garden. And there's a lovely little verse about God walking through the garden in the cool of the day. In other words, God and Adam, they used to hang out. They used to know each other face to face.

[ 10 : 37 ] But when Adam and Eve sinned, the very point was that he was kicked out of the garden. And that angel with the sword was saying, you cannot come in here as a guardian to stop them coming in.

There was now a barrier between God and people because of sin. The reason that we can't see God, friends, particularly if you're here and you're not a Christian, is not because God doesn't exist. It's because we cannot exist with him. Because he is holy and we are not. It would be a very, very bad idea if we came into contact with the living God, given who we are, all of us.

And so that's why we cannot see God. And that's why there is a barrier between us. In the Old Testament, God saved his people, Israel, and said, I want to live with you. I want to dwell with you. And so they built this tabernacle tent that was like God's mini palace. And then later on, the temple, which was not a tent, but it was a real building, a beautiful big building, which was like God's palace living among the people.

[ 11 : 32 ] But even in the throne room, middle room, the Holy of Holies room, there was this curtain that was like a barrier. It communicated, I want to live among you, but I can't because of who you are and who I am, he says.

I'm holy and you're not. There's a sense of God wants to live amongst us, but it just cannot happen. And of course, then Jesus himself came into the world. God took on flesh.

And if you were alive 2,000 years ago, you could have seen God with your own eyes. But one day we'll see him with all his glory. There's a brilliant, brilliant verse in 1 Peter 3, actually.

Did I put it on there? Yeah, there it is. That tells us the reason that Jesus came into the world. And this is brilliant, particularly if you're here today and you're not a Christian. Let me just read this verse.

The way I often illustrate this, I bet you Martin's done this with you before, is if you imagine that's us and God's on the ceiling.

[ 12 : 30 ] Because of who we are and the things we've done, the things we've done wrong, there is this barrier between us and God. And when Jesus came into the world, he didn't have that barrier because, do you know, there was a man who never said or did or thought anything wrong ever.

There was never a barrier. There was no sin problem between him and God. But when he died on the cross, Jesus took our sins on himself. The righteous for the unrighteous.

So that we might be able to know God. Look at that verse again. He suffered once for sins. The righteous for the unrighteous. Why? To bring you to God.

That's why he came and that's why he died. So that you could know God. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, I don't know you or your background. But it might just be that in your heart there's a hole.

There's something missing from life. I speak to people like this who say this all the time. And I want to tell you that hole is filled by God. You are made to know him.

[ 13 : 33 ] And that's why Jesus came and died. If you were to believe in him, all the stuff you've done wrong could be on him. It wouldn't be on you. So that the way is open. And you can know God for yourself.

That is the hole that's in your soul. He said cornelly. Come to know him. That's exactly what he wants. Let's just forward again back to Revelation 22 though.

What will it be like then for those of us who trust and believe in Jesus to actually see God? They will see his face. Stop and think what's the most amazing thing you've seen.

Have you been somewhere that just totally left you speechless? The Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls or a mountain range or something absolutely extraordinary where you just stood there and you just said nothing.

You just went. Maybe it's the night sky somewhere out, not in the city, you know, where you can see every star. You just go, wow. Now, what will it be like with your own eyes to see God?

[ 14 : 40 ] Every hair on your entire body will be stood on end. It will be the most breathless, speechless moment.

That's God. And he'll be amongst us and with us forever. And as well, not just looking at something like the Grand Canyon. It's just, frankly, it's rocks.

It's amazing looking rocks. This is a person who is your father, who is your God, who is your husband, who loves you.

That illustration I gave you as we come up the aisle. He loves us. We're coming up to him. And he's awesome. That is the centerpiece of heaven.

There's lots of great stuff about heaven. The banquets, the food, the fun, the joy, the society, the stuff we'll be doing. It will be brilliant. But that is the centerpiece. And that is the reason why everything is brilliant.

[ 15 : 40 ] It's because God is right there. In my last two points, I just want to spend a bit of time thinking about God's perspective and our perspective. How does God feel about dwelling with us forever?

We should ask him. And how should we feel about it? So in my second point, I've called it God's longing for us. God's longing for us. God's longing for us. When the New Testament talks about how we relate to Jesus, one of the funny phrases it uses is this.

In Christ. A Christian is someone who's in Christ. That is to say, we're not just followers of Jesus, although we are. We're not just servants of Jesus, although we are.

We're not just people who love Jesus, although we do. We're not just believers in Jesus, although we are. We are in Christ. It's so much closer. It's very difficult to get your head around.

But when you become a believer, you're not just around him or following him. You become one with him. You are in him. And furthermore, God lives in us by his Holy Spirit.

[ 16 : 50 ] God doesn't just lead us or walk alongside us. He lives in us. The way God relates to us or has made it is that we are in him and he is in us.

It couldn't be closer. It's totally extraordinary. The Bible metaphors for this, to try and help us. One is the vine and the branches. You know, you see a tree and a branch.

The branch needs to be in the tree trunk, otherwise it dies. It's where it gets its life sap and that's why it bears its fruit. And that's what it's like to be in Jesus. We're one with him, just like a branch must be one with its trunk.

Or, of course, the other big image the Bible uses is marriage. Two become one. Man and a woman, they are two different people and yet they're one.

And in the ideal marriage, you're one in spirit and in heart and in intention and in purpose. Totally consumed and for each other. Two individuals and yet one.

[ 17 : 49 ] It's the Trinity, isn't it? Three are one. We become part of the Trinity. God wants to marry us. It's the difference between having a flatmate and having a spouse. He's not just dwelling with

us.

He's married to us. He's one with us forever. And that's his desire. If you take us on to the next slide, there's a brilliant verse in Ephesians 1 where God, he tells this is what God's plan is for the end of time.

When the times reach their fulfillment, God's plan is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Or if you read the ESV translation, it's to unite all things in Christ.

Those are both good ways of translating that verse. See, it's amazing. God's plan is not just for you and him to be one, but for all of us to be one with him.

In fact, all of the cosmos to be one. There's a sense in which God's ultimate plan is that everything would be one, united, totally in harmony. It's extraordinary.

[18:51] And that's totally different to other religions. See, the Islamic view of heaven is a paradise place that God's not there because God is still holy and we cannot be in God's presence.

So God is distant. You get to enjoy the fun place, but not God. Or the Buddhist view or the Hindu view, the Nirvana view, is about oneness.

But the idea is we disappear. We become ourselves one with the cosmos, but we are no longer us anymore. Like a drop into the ocean, a drop of water. It just becomes the ocean.

You're gone. You're gone. That's the aim of Buddhism and Hinduism. So he understands this oneness, but you lose yourself. The Christian view of heaven is that we are us.

We are real. We have real life. We have a society. And yet everyone is one because they are one in Christ and one in the Father. Global, universal oneness.

[19:48] That is the point of all things. That's where it's all going. So from God's point of view, at the moment there is this great tension.

He is revulsed at the rebellion and sin that he sees in people. And he is a just God. He will bring justice. And yet at the same time, he longs for a people who will be his bride.

And he longs for that. He desires that. He has passion and affection for that. One of the words the Old Testament often describes of God is that he's a jealous God.

And that can get twisted as if he's some nasty person who's just jealous of things, like jealous of someone's shoes or jealous of someone's car or something. But God is not jealous in that sense. God is jealous like a husband is jealous of a wife who's cheating on him.

Because he loves her and he desires her. And he wants to be one with her. And he wants her to love him and him alone. In the prophet Hosea, for example, in the Old Testament, towards the end of the Old Testament, God is very evocative in this imagery of marriage.

[20:55] And he actually tells Hosea to go and marry a woman who's going to cheat on him.

Because that's how God feels about his people. They've gone off and worshipped other gods. God feels like a cheated husband when his people think, Oh, it's that God. I'm just going to go and do something else or worship something else or give my devotion or my time or my money or my energy or my effort to something else rather than him.

He feels like a spurned husband. He gets jealous. In fact, in Hosea, he divorces his people. He sends them into exile. Just like Tiger Woods' wife did the same to him because he cheated on her so many times.

But yet, still, even then, when he feels he's got divorced, this utterly adulterous wife, these people, he still wants them back. Can I get you to turn with it?

Because it's such a brilliant passage. In Hosea 2, on page 902. Just turn to page 902. Because I want to show you how a husband who has been cheated on time and time and time and time again still loves his people, still desires them.

It's amazing. Hosea 2, on page 902. This is him looking forward to a time when he might have her back again.

[22:14] In verse 16, right at the end of Hosea 2, verse 16. In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband. Not that other man, your husband, or that other God.

You will no longer call me my master. You'll call me my husband. I'll remove the names of the Baals from her lips, those of these other gods. No longer will their names be invoked.

In that day, I'll make a covenant for them. With the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky, and the creatures that move along the ground, that's the whole world. Bow and sword and battle, I will abolish from the land that all might light down in safety.

That's what heaven will be like. Do you see that?

I will betroth you to me ever. I love you. In verse 21, he says, In that day, I will respond, declares the Lord. I'll respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth, the whole world.

[ 23 : 18 ] And the earth will respond to the grain, and the new wine, and the olive oil. And they will respond to Jezreel, this place of abundance. I will plant her for myself in the land. I will show my love to the one I called, not my loved one.

I will say to the one called, not my people. You are my people. And they will say, you are my God. You are my husband. You are my bride. Do you see what God wants? He longs for a people to come back that will be a true, true marriage.

A marriage of faithfulness. A moment ago we read those verses in Revelation 21 about the new heavens and the new earth. Those are actually verses used from Isaiah.

Let's see how Isaiah puts it. There's this on the screen. Again, look at God's language of affection. See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create. For I will create Jerusalem, that's us, to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem.

[ 24 : 22 ] I will take delight in my people. The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. It's very Revelation 21, isn't it? Did you see in the middle of that? I will delight in my people.

I think you're wonderful. I will rejoice in you because I love you, because you're my bride. So that's how God feels about the new heavens and the new earth.

Just as the centerpiece for us is him, the centerpiece for him is us. What? It's extraordinary. But what about us?

What about our longing for God? That's the next slide, the next point. Look, the Psalms are a great place to go to look for affection language about God. And one of the big images you get in the...

I'll just go back a bit. I'll tell you in a minute. One of the big images or metaphors is this idea of a desert and thirsting for God. So there's Psalm 42.

[ 25 : 19 ] As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God?

Or Psalm 63. You, God, are my God. Earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you. My whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

That's the spiritual description that David has for his affection for God. Like you're totally thirsty and you're desperate to drink of God, to know him.

You long for him so much. Now, to be crude and stereotyped, I find that amongst Christians there are two kind of camps. There's the camps who find this kind of affection and desire language quite difficult and strange and alien and awkward.

And then there's others that love it and just go for it and love to talk about the love of God and desiring God and that kind of thing. And we're probably all on that spectrum somewhere, I imagine. I often find that the Christians who find this more awkward or react against it in some way have really good motives because often they want to emphasize the holiness of God and fear of God.

[ 26 : 39 ] And they fear that the guys that love all the affection language are a bit too much, Jesus is my boyfriend. And it's all a bit sort of soft and soft focus.

And there's lack of holiness. There's a lack of fear. There's a lack of reverence and respect. And so I think that's, I understand that criticism. I think that has some merit to it. And yet I would appeal to you, I think, if you're the sort of person that does find that difficult, and it might be by temperament. It might be by your church background. That this is a biblical way of thinking. It's right to love God. In fact, with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, it's totally right to love God.

It's right to desire Him like a wife desires a husband. I know it's different. I know it's weird. But that is actually right. That's appropriate. And I'd love to encourage you to long for God.

Long for the holy, fearful God. The God of greatness. The God of awe. And love Him with all of your heart. And desire Him. Let me just show you one of my favorite verses.

[ 27 : 48 ] This is, to kind of close. This is Paul's language of looking forward to heaven. It's from Philippians 1. I think we've got it on the screen. Let me read this to you. This is how Paul thinks about heaven.

For me, he says, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I'm to go on living in the body, this will be fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose?

I don't know. I'm torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. But it's more necessary for you that I remain in the body. For you. So convinced of this, I know that I will remain.

And I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith. My experience with most people is they're terrified of dying and moaning about living. Do you find that? Paul is tremendously excited about dying and full of life.

It's a win-win situation. And it's all because of his view of heaven. See, the thing for him is heaven is not ski slopes and surfing for the rest of his life. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain because I desire to depart and be with Christ.

[ 28 : 59 ] Not be on the ski slopes or being fed by virgins. For him, it's about being with Christ. And that's why he's not scared of dying.

He even says it's better. It's better by far to be dead. Not because he's suicidal. Because something coming is so much better. That marriage that he's living for.

I don't know what... Is that your way of thinking? Too often it's not mine. Do you long for heaven, brothers and sisters? Do you long to be with God?

To be his bride? Do you thirst for the new earth? Because God himself will be there. If you do, if you long to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, Paul's advice is just hold off.

Because he says, actually, even though I want to do that with all of my soul, there's something I've got to do before that death. And that is, it's more necessary for me to remain here for your sake, he says to the church.

[ 30 : 08 ] See that? I love that last verse. He's the reason I'm alive, he says. He's the reason I'm not dead, which is what I'd love to be because I get to be with my Lord. He's the reason for living.

To continue with all of you for your progress. And joy in the faith. That is a point of life, right? Until you get to meet your husband for the rest of forever, who loves you and whom you will love.

Until that day, we want to work on each other and on the world to serve God. So that people grow in their faith and in their joy. That is what life is for.

I mean, take a look around the room right now. Look at everyone. Are you living for that person's faith and that person's joy? Is that what life is about for you?

And those of you in the youth group, same. Look around your youth group. Could you say to the person in your youth group, I want your faith to grow and I want your joy to grow in the Lord Jesus. Because that is worth living for.

[ 31 : 12 ] Until that great day when we get to see him with our own eyes. Our husband who loves us. Do you know, as I said at the beginning, is that image of the bride coming up the aisle.

Well, one day that will be us. And as we gaze forward, our God himself will be there. And his eyes of love will be on us. What?

It's amazing, isn't it? Heaven will be fantastic because God is there. Let's pray. Let's pray. What amazing grace that you would save people like us, Father.

Not just to go to heaven, but to be with you. To be one with you and to know you forever. And even now we have this joy of the Holy Spirit living in us.

That we might be one with you. Lord Jesus. I pray for all of us. That you would raise our affections and our desires. That we would long for that day.

[ 32 : 19 ] And run for that day. And strain for that day. And rejoice because of that day. And live every day until that day. In the light of that day.

So that everything we do. Every tension of our heart. Every prayer. Every word. All that we do.

Might be for the good of your people. The rest of the bride. Until we all get to share with you forever more.

You are such a great God. And we thank you for your grace. Amen. Thank you.