

Look! Listen! Trust!

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[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 21. 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 out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice in the throne room 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 will be their God. He will wipe away 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 sitting on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

He said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

[1 : 22] Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

This is the second death. Well, thanks so much, David, for reading.

Let me add my welcome to Josh's. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the ministry trainees here at the church. It'll be a great help to us all if you can keep your Bibles open. That's it, page 1249, if they've happened to fall shut there.

You'll find a brief outline of where we're going tonight on the screens. My apologies, they're not on the service sheets. That's just an omission on my behalf, and hopefully that'll be helpful for you as we follow along.

Let's pray to God for help as we start. Heavenly Father, we're so thankful for the work of the Lord Jesus, meaning that we can sit here this evening in your world, gathered as your people, to study your word.

[2 : 34] We ask that tonight you'd help us to dwell deeply upon the vision and words you gave to John, and that he recorded, so that we might know the reality of what will happen one day when the Lord Jesus has returned.

So help us to look, to listen, to trust your word to us this evening. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Is this better?

Excellent. Well, I wonder, how often do you think about eternal life? How often does it cross your mind? And when you think about eternal life and the new creation, well, what is it exactly that you think about?

If you're anything like me, you'll sometimes struggle just to picture exactly what that will be like. What exactly does life in the new creation look like?

And what will it be like to live forever? I'm sure many of us have had friends who don't yet know Jesus say to us when we've told them Jesus' offer, I'm not really sure that I'd want to live forever.

[3 : 47] I find life kind of weary and boring. That's not something that massively appeals to me. And so because it can be sometimes hard to grasp, we find ourselves difficult to get excited for it and we find ourselves often taking our eyes off the new creation and becoming fixated on things around us.

And when we do think about it, often it can be quite shallow. We think, oh, I'm looking forward to the new creation. I guess it'll be nice. No more tears, no more dying, no more pain.

That sounds good. But often we don't sit and dwell on it. So it's my hope this evening that as we sit and dwell on Revelation 21, that together we will have our hearts warmed to what is awaiting us as Christians.

That as we're challenged to keep on looking at God's plan for where this world will end, we'll be encouraged that God's plan really is so much better than anything else could possibly offer us.

So let's dive into God's word together. Our first point is the Lord will purify and unify all things together. Verses one to four there.

[4 : 57] Last week, if you were here, we saw the resurrection of the dead as the Lord came to judge all people who have lived on earth. We saw Satan fully defeated and the Lord sitting on his glorious judgment throne.

Glance back with me to chapter 20, verse 11. John writes, then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence and there was no place for them.

The earth and heavens as we know it were gone. God's initial creation had fled away so corrupted by the sin and impurity in it that there was no place for it.

And so that begs the question, well, what does the future hold for all Christians? for those whose names are in the book of life that we saw last week, what's it going to look like?

Well, here, John is shown by God that what comes after judgment is God creating a new. Verse 1 starts off with, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.

[6 : 09] It's not that this world is fixed up, patched back together and we continue here in a life relatively similar to that. Because, as I said, we can often struggle to get our heads around it thinking, well, there just won't be any frustration at work, no unreasonable bosses, no family tensions, no disputes with friends over trivial matters, whatever else it is, life will just be a bit easier and that'll be nice.

But God creates a new heaven and a new earth so life will naturally be different. It will be so much better. And we'll see more about that as we go on this evening.

And as the Lord purifies his creation, as he creates anew, there's no longer any sea. And we've seen in Revelation so far that the sea is symbolic for hostility against God, for chaos that fights against God's created order.

So God removes that chaos, that rebellion that was so characteristic of this world that we live in and he creates a pure new creation. verse 2, after God has made everything ready, John writes that he saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

In chapter 19, we had the announcement of the marriage ceremony as the angel said in verse 9 of that chapter, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[7 : 43] And now we have the bride as if she's walking down this vertical aisle, coming down to meet her husband. And it's just worth noting, this is a new earth, so it's also a new Jerusalem.

We don't need to go building anything, don't need to try and rebuild Jerusalem anywhere on earth. This is new. So it's worth asking, well, why mention Jerusalem at all, given how much strife there seems to be these days about it?

Well, partly, it's a contrast to the wicked city of Babylon that we saw a while ago. We've had a tale of two cities. We saw the utter destruction of Babylon, and now we see the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

And as always, alongside that, the Old Testament pictures are our key to understanding Revelation well. That's what we've seen in these weeks. And in Isaiah 65, verses 17 to 19, the Lord speaks through Isaiah that after the day of judgment, he will create a new heavens and earth and create Jerusalem, his people, and he will be glad in them.

He, the Lord God Almighty, will be glad in his people. He will find joy in his people. After the great day of judgment at the end of chapter 20, God's people are finally ready to dwell with God, a picture of peace and unity.

[9 : 15] And let's stop and think about that for a bit. Because actually, we can lose how good and sweet this is. It has been so good for me as I've gone to prepare this over the last couple of weeks, to sit and to dwell on how beautiful a picture this is.

As Adam and Eve left the garden back in Genesis 3, God clothed them to cover up the shame they felt from their sin. And now we see that God's people are coming down to be back in perfect relationship with God, but this time clothed in perfect fine linen.

They left separated from God, from the Garden of Eden. They needed a way back. And as we think moving forward to Abraham, God promised that to him and his offspring that they would dwell in the land of Canaan forever.

And it looked like relationship and dwelling was back on the cards. If God's people could get there, then perhaps they could dwell with God again. And to Moses, that same promise was there.

If he and the people would live faithfully in the land, perhaps they could get back to it. Only they couldn't. And that's the story of the rest of the Old Testament, isn't it?

[10 : 29] Of Israel constantly and perpetually staining themselves with sin, having to dwell with this immense barrier between them and God. They were in the land and then they were kicked out of the land into exile and they were brought back into the land, but the problem was still the same.

They could not dwell with a holy God because they themselves were impure. And thousands of years on, we are still awaiting to dwell in that way with the Lord God again like they did in Eden.

We're still to experience that dwelling. But at some point in the future, a voice will say, verse 3, Luke, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

They will be his God and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. God himself will dwell with his people, not separated by a temple curtain, not separated by cherubim, but in deep, close union, united with his people.

The goal of the Bible in so many ways is to get back to being in that relationship, dwelling with God. And in Revelation 21, we read of it happening. It says, they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[11 : 54] And be assured, verse 4, 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.

It's as if God makes a perfect marriage vows to his people. At weddings just now, we tend in the vows for people to say something like this, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live.

And then the minister says, what God has joined together, let no man separate. But here, it's as if God promises there will only be best, not worse. There will only be richest, no poorer.

There will only be health, not sickness. It will be to love and to cherish from now unto forever because there will be no death. What God has joined together, no man will be able to separate.

He's going to purify all evil away. He's going to take pain away. He'll protect his people, ensuring unity forever. It's what our hearts are yearning for deeply.

[13 : 09] What people have yearned for for so many generations. And so it's worth asking, how excited for this are we? When we read this passage, how excited are we to get to experience this?

How excited are you? It's real and it's coming. It's so much better than we often let ourselves believe. We have this habit to shrink it down, don't we?

Try and make it fit in our minds, something we can understand. Because sometimes we find that easier than letting ourselves just sit and wonder at what it will be like. a people united with their creator in a pure world.

Let's turn to point two together. That's the big scale of what we learn God will do in Revelation 21. And now verses six to eight, our second point. The Lord will unify and purify you.

This is what he will do for Christians if you are a Christian sitting in this room tonight. We're going to come back to verse five in our third point. But it's just worth noting just now that as we move on, it changes and John sees God sitting on the throne.

[14 : 23] And in chapters four and five when we saw inside the throne room, we saw the Father was on the throne with Jesus the Lamb at his right hand. And the Father is now speaking rather than showing to John.

And verse six, God says, it is done. With the creation of the new earth and the new heaven, God declares his saving, judging work is done.

He has removed all sin and corruption and brought his people to dwell with him in security forever. True justice will have been done.

Enemies defeated, the faithful established. accomplished. He also says, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. God was at the start of the creation of the world and he will be there at the end of the world as we know it.

He will remove all impurities. It's a totally unique claim that gives us real deep assurance that as we read these verses, we know that God really can do this.

[15 : 30] The Lord God, the creator, can start and end the world as we know it. He can and will purify and unite us as Christians to him. Just look at the end of verse 6.

It says, To the first day I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. For the one who yearns to dwell with God, who seeks not this life but true life with God, who seeks true dwelling with him, to the first day is freely given salvation into the life-giving presence of the living God forever.

To the faithful Christian who draws upon the strength of God to fight the temptations of this world, who longs for the new creation, God freely gives eternal life.

And we read that to thirst is to be among the victorious. Verse 7, those who are victorious will inherit all this. Those who persevere unto the end will be united with God in the new creation.

And if you were here when we looked at chapters 2 and 3, you might remember that we had seven letters to seven churches written by Jesus. And each one of them had a similar refrain that said, to the one who is victorious.

[16 : 54] And then Jesus promised that they would either get something or be something. As he wrote to those churches, sometimes rebuking, sometimes encouraging, often both, he gave this promise.

To the church in Sardis, for example, he said, to the one who is victorious, they will be dressed in white. Like we saw at the start of our chapter in verse 2.

To the one who perseveres, there is so much to inherit. Not just eternal life, but verse 7 goes on with, I will be their God and they will be my children.

There's adoption here into God's own family. It's on offer. An intimate, personal relationship with the Lord. It's like a loving father, but so much better than our earthly fathers.

Because God does not disappoint. He does not let down. He is totally reliable. He can and will bring you in as a child of him if you're a Christian here tonight.

[17 : 59] And I think that's also an idea we can be all too used to, that that's what God does. So let's stop and think and let it warm our hearts. Does God have to adopt us as a child to bring us into the new creation?

Well, no. He could bring us in as a friend, as an acquaintance, as a stranger, as a servant. And we could certainly have no complaints whatsoever. It would still be an immense grace from him.

But he chooses us, weak and feeble as we are, to be adopted into his family, to share in his inheritance, to be in a deep relationship with him as we were made to be.

Adopted in with brothers and sisters in Christ across generations. What a glorious truth that we can embrace. And read with me verse 8.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderous, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

[19 : 05] This is the second death. This is a massive but. Not everyone is a part of the bride. Not everyone is victorious and adopted in.

For many, they will only live on this earth. They will not see the new creation. Their future is the fiery lake of burning sulfur, the second death, as judgment and punishment for how they chose to live.

God will purify them out. And in the chapters of judgment we've seen over the last few weeks in Revelation, God has carried out his justice as he's pronounced judgment for those who aren't willing to stand by him on earth, who don't choose Christ.

And those who aren't victorious, their just punishment, their just reward for their actions is the second death. And if you're a Christian here tonight, I'm sure as we read that list, you thought there's maybe something there that incriminates you.

Well, this is not here to challenge us or to scare us. It's here to bring us deep assurance and joy. It's to tell us that the temptations that seek to rupture us away from God, who seek to insert that barrier between us dwelling with him again, they will be purified out.

[20 : 28] The temptations that we face, gone. False teachers, gone. All devil-inspired activity that seeks to stop us from being in relationship with God.

gone. That security that means that there will not be a second fall in the new creation. It will not go back to how it is just now.

And in the letter to Smyrna in chapter 2, Jesus says, be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. So Jesus promises to those who keep on going, you're not purified out, but you're adopted and married in, dressed in new robes, ready to dwell with God forever.

But if you're here and you're not a Christian, if you're not trusting in Jesus alone for your right standing before God, there is a point where it will be too late to turn, too late and to receive all of this that God promises, too late to be adopted in.

[21 : 42] It will be too late to escape the second death. The point at which God says, it is done, it will be far too late to change your mind. So turn now, turn and accept Jesus in humility and repentance and he will adopt you into God's family.

You can see he offers you a meaningful future beyond the grave for us all to accept. If that is you, I'd love to chat to you afterwards about what that would mean.

And that brings us on to our third and final point this evening. Look, listen, trust. That's verse five. This passage is structured so that this is the core point of the text, the central point being made.

John sees the throne and hears God speak from it. And God says in verse five, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.

The father declares, this is what I'm doing. He instructs John to write it down for these words are trustworthy and true. The implication being that not only these words can be trusted, but that the church needs them.

[23 : 07] They need to know what God is doing. And that's because people will spread lies. The world will try to convince us that we're wrong. As is so often true, our expectations, they say, will be crushed by reality.

They say that we've been tricked and it won't happen. It's so often true what we see in the world today. They say, that will be the same for you. I had a similar thing happen to me this week, actually.

Emily, my wife and I were meant to be on holiday this week. We had booked a lovely Airbnb. It was on the coast. It was going to look out. We're really excited for it. Only we pitched up and the Airbnb was nowhere to be found.

We called the host and he was extremely sketchy to say the least. He was very evasive. He told us, oh, well, actually, you're too far up the coast. Go here. And when we went there, not only was it in the middle of nowhere, it wasn't on the coast.

It looked nothing like we had expected it to. And after chatting to him, we just thought, you know what? I long to go home. And so we came home and we had a really nice holiday here.

[24 : 17] It was great. But the reality was bitterly disappointing. And some people in the world try to tell us that is what will happen to you Christians.

Satan tries to tell us that that is what the new creation will be like. Either we'll get there and it just won't be there or it'll be nothing like we expected it to be. That's what they want us to believe.

There'll be nowhere near as good as Revelation 21 advertises it to be. But unlike that sketchy guy who just wanted to make some money off me, God cares for us like family.

He adopts us in as sons and daughters. His words are trustworthy and true. There is no deceit in it. He's not trying to sell us in the hope that in case we don't come, everything he says is true.

It will be so much better than we can imagine. And so we need to look at the pictures he's given us. We need to listen to his words that he says.

[25 : 21] And we can trust that he can and will do all of this. And we need that because being victorious often doesn't feel like it on this world.

How often does it feel like those who seem to reject the Lord in every conceivable way are the ones who are prospering, are the ones who look to be winning on this world.

And doesn't that scream at us in so many different ways? You're doing it wrong, you've misunderstood what's going on, you're living for the wrong thing. And even in things that aren't so outright anti-God, we still see so many things that has untrustworthy messaging that just subtly seeks to undermine the fact that there is a new creation coming.

Take, for example, the UN's World Environmental Day. In 2022, it ran with the theme Only One World, prompted sayings like the Earth is all we've got, there's no planet B, we only get one world.

And the theme for the same day last year was our land, our future. But are those things really true? If you were in Glasgow at the time of COP26, you probably saw lots of similar things on protesters' cards.

[26 : 41] And what that really says is there's nothing coming beyond death, the world is only our future, nothing can be trusted or relied upon except what you can see in the here and now.

What you see is what there is and that's what you need to do and be concerned with. Now, please don't mishear me. I've got nothing against World Environmental Day. I have no doubt that we can and should do more to care for God's creation.

It's just an example of how easily some of this messaging that comes from a good cause can actually subtly and subconsciously undercut what we're living for.

It undercuts our belief that there is something better coming, that we don't have to try and fix this world because God will create anew. We know that everything will be made new by God, that eternal life is coming in a better new creation where there will be a pure world where we will dwell with God forever.

And so we need to look at his plan. We need to listen to his words and trust that he can and will do it. We need to think about the new creation.

[27 : 53] We need to think about eternal life more. What would it be like on every Sunday to have our eyes moved by one another off of this world onto the new creation, onto the coming eternal life?

I know that would do me a great deal of good if every Sunday somebody prompted me to do that because we're very prone to getting fixated on what's in front of us. Be so helpful to encourage each other with that coming reality where life will be so much better and we will dwell with God forever.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you really will make all things new. We look forward to the day where we are united with you, dwelling together in a pure world forever.

and so we pray that the Lord Jesus would come soon so that promise may become a reality and until he does, help us to keep fixing our own and each other's eyes upon the fact of the coming eternity, striving forward together to be among the victorious who are not hurt by the second death.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.