



GOOD SHEPHERD

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

All Things New

Revelation 21:1-7; 22 (sel. vv); Luke 4:14-21

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We've spent all summer in Revelation reading letters from Jesus to the Church – letters to you and me! Today we are in the final two chapters of Revelation, the literal end of the book! I do want to take a moment to talk about the wonderful and vivid imagery and the promises of God. But I also want to look with you at the way Jesus brought that Heavenly future down to earth in his own ministry. Because of that, these promises and this hope are also something we can experience for ourselves today – not completely and eternally yet, but tangibly and powerfully.

New Heaven, New Earth (Rev 21-22)

Revelation 21 and 22 are some of the most beautiful, hopeful, and encouraging chapters of scripture. They describe with vivid imagery how God will make all things right and all things new. God will come among us once and for all. It is an intentional overlap of the beginning of the story when God created the beautiful Garden of Eden and walked among it with the human beings He made. Let's consider some of the imagery in chapter 21. There is so much that I'll just touch briefly on each phrase.

New Heaven and New Earth (v.1) – One of the themes in these two chapters is that the old will go away and the new will come. That applies to sin and the curse and it applies to creation itself. Everything will be made new and that theme will be repeated throughout the chapters. One of the notable things in this first phrase cuts against the childhood notion that Heaven is “away out there” somewhere and there will no longer be a ‘here’. This say, rather,

that God will re-make this world and be present with us, joining Heaven and Earth in something new. That's completely mind-boggling, to be sure, but it's not without precedent, for the first creation in the Garden of Eden was something unlike what we know now. It was all good, sin had not yet entered the world, and God walked with our first parents. This is an intentional bookend to that. As God first created, so will He re-create. And it will be good, and tangible, and God will be with us and we with Him.

The Holy City, New Jerusalem (v.2) – The earthly city of Jerusalem has always been a symbol of God's blessing and God's presence. It's like a microcosm of Earth. God chose a people and revealed Himself in a special way to them. God blessed their King and their Kingdom and this holy city in the middle of a Promised Land. And like Eden, it was tarnished by sin and disobedience and it was lost (and regained and lost and regained). To speak of a "New Jerusalem" is to press in on the "New Earth" to say that not only will the world be re-created, but God's promises and intent for humanity, provisionally demonstrated in the Old Jerusalem, will not disappear, but be re-created as well.

God With Us (vv.3-4) – In the next few verses we read that the "tabernacle of God is among men... and He will dwell among them and they shall be His people." This is not new news. This was the promise to Adam, to Abraham, and to the world through Jesus. Jesus was the great embodied promise of "God with us." He was with us for a while to accomplish redemption. Through him we will forever be joined to God, WITH God and God WITH us. And this isn't abstract theology; I appreciate the specific and vivid language of verse 4: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." We read that verse at funerals in hope, to lay claim to God's power in the face of the tears, pain, and death we know in this world. God will be with us and all will be well.

Making All Things New (v.5) – Pressing in on the theme, we read in v. 5 that God is "making all things new." This is God's great healing act; this is re-

creation; this is God's *shalom* (peace, blessing, wholeness). In this verse and then later in the next chapter God declares, "These words are faithful and true." This is a promise of God; you can count on these things. This is True with a capital 'T'.

Spring of the Water of Life (v.6) – There will be more about the water of life in chapter 22, but here we get a vivid picture of God's grace. God will give those who are thirsty from the spring of the water of life without cost. We don't – we can't – earn or deserve that drink. God offers it in compassion, in love, and without condition. Again, it reminds me of the Garden of Eden where humanity had everything it needed from a good and gracious God.

Children of God (v.7) – Finally, in verse 7 we read that the one who overcomes – that's the language from the letters of Jesus we've been looking at this summer for those who repent and trust Jesus – the one who overcomes will inherit these things and be named as children of God. Specifically here 'son' as the one who inherits everything from the Father, but extended in Christ to male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free.

Now you may ask yourself (I asked myself)... if this is so similar to the Garden of Eden, what is keeping humanity from just messing it up all over again. And I would say – JESUS. The difference in this re-creation is that Jesus is in the center of it all as the God-Man who bore and continues to bear the scars of humanity's great sin-failure. The New Heavens and New Earth aren't a shiny, glossed-over version of the world. It's not the Pearly Gates and harps and all that. It is a reality that bears the scars of its sin and salvation. Scars show that a healing has taken place. You might be cut open, but when the cut heals and the skin comes together, the scar declares healing has happened. The presence of Jesus is why this new thing is not like the old thing. He is the living reminder of just how good God is and his faithfulness anchors us there with God.

There is more imagery in chapter 22:

Water of Life (v.1) – This imagery is even more reminiscent of Eden. There is a river of the water of life. In Genesis there were four rivers. We just read that God gives this water to all who thirst. It is for drinking and it is the gift of God.

Tree of Life (v.2) – There is a tree of life – somehow on either side of the river. This is a tree of eating, described as the “healing of the nations.” Its fruit is also for consumption, as a reminder of God’s great salvation of the world through Christ.

No Curse, No Night; in God’s Presence (vv.3-5) – And so there will no longer be a curse; it has been lifted. There will be no night because of the presence of God... a literal reversal beyond Eden to the first Creation itself when God separated day and night. Now, this is probably a good point to say that this is a) poetic imagery and b) a vision John is having. I think the focus is on the significance of the presence of God rather than the physics of where and whether the yellow star that is our sun will be present or necessary or not. I don’t know. I don’t think that is why these words were written.

Inviting God (vv.12-20) – Finally, in the remaining verses of chapter 22 Jesus promises to come and he invites us to draw near. Both are there at the very end: “Let the one who is thirsty... who wishes... take the water of life without cost.” (v.17) And we say, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” (v.20)

There is much more that could be said. What does ‘quickly’ mean? Is 2,000 years since Jesus slow or quick? It sure seems slow to us. But scripture says for God a thousand years is as a day. Certainly we can lay hold of the human desire for Jesus to come soon. We can live prepared. We can live in hope.

But there is more. There is more pressing all that reality into our lives than “living with hope.” And I don’t discount living with hope. That’s an important thing and it makes a difference in life. But I want to turn to Luke 4 to talk about some other ways the New Heavens and New Earth connect to our present reality.

Here, Near, Coming Soon (Luke 4)

Luke 4 is an important passage in the life of Jesus. Essentially, it records his public claim to being the Messiah in his hometown. He would have grown up there going to the synagogue. He went on a Sabbath and read from the scroll of Isaiah when it was handed to him. And he read a powerful text from Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. (vv.18-19)*

For Isaiah, the “favorable year of the Lord” was when God was going to restore Israel’s blessing, to make things right, to heal and make whole. (Does that sound familiar at all?) And Jesus, after reading that passage, said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (v.21)

In his ministry Jesus would do these very things. He healed the blind, he declared forgiveness to those captive to sin, he released those oppressed by spirits or social stigma. He declared the coming of the Kingdom of God, a.k.a. the favorable year of the Lord.

So here’s where those dots connect. That Kingdom of God, the favorable year of the Lord, is the same Kingdom described in Revelation! Didn’t you notice the overlap in wording? ...the blind will see, the oppressed will know freedom... God will wipe every tear from their eye.

So how does that work? You have Creation, you have Isaiah around 600 B.C., you have Jesus in A.D. 30, you have us now in A.D. 2019, and you have the scenes in Revelation in some unknown future. Let’s look to Jesus. We just

read that he considered Isaiah's words to be fulfilled. We know that he announced the Kingdom of God again and again in his teaching. When pressed by the Pharisees about when the Kingdom was coming he answered, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:21) Other times he said the Kingdom was 'near' or 'at hand' (Luke 10:9). Yet when he taught the disciples to pray, he taught them to pray, "Your Kingdom come." His parables may help explain: the Kingdom is like a seed which has been planted (it's here, it's at hand, it's in our midst), but it will grow into a mighty plant or tree (not yet fully grown). It seems that we are in an in-between time... Jesus announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God, but there is more yet to come. There will be a New Heaven and a New Earth. In Christ God came among us for a time, but in eternity God will make His home with us forever.

The point is that we have already tasted and we are tasting now a bit of what this Revelation-future is like. We don't live without hope or experience of God; indeed we pray for and hope that in this in-between time that God may wipe a tear or two. We pray and believe that God does sometimes heal and always holds us. In Christ we can experience the forgiveness of sin and, as far as that goes, the lifting of the curse, though it remains for a while all around us (and we sin again). But it's available to us now. That's what Jesus was announcing at his home town synagogue. That's what Jesus taught during his lifetime and accomplished with his death and resurrection. Jesus has already brought God among us. Revelation describes the *completion* of what God initiated in Jesus and envisioned all the way back at Creation.

So this is Good News: God is with us in Christ. The Kingdom of God is at hand. We don't know how long it will be until those final scenes, but we can now the presence and blessing and *shalom* of God today, because of Jesus Christ. So I'd speak the words of Jesus to you: "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.