

Paradise Restored

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[0 : 00] something to look forward to and be encouraged. There are plenty of other verses, obviously, that we could look at and share. But I decided to tackle one of the most difficult books, the book of Revelation.

And the book of Revelation is essentially kind of like a living parable. It's cryptic. It's written in vision language, so it doesn't speak linearly.

It speaks in a way that gives hints and pictures, snapshots. It'll give a snapshot of one particular view, and it'll present that from a different angle, another snapshot, and so forth.

But Revelation is very intriguing. One of the weeks that I teach in the New Testament course at Colorado Christian University, we dive into Revelation.

And that is probably the most difficult and grueling classes that the students encounter, because they read it, and you might as well read Alice in Wonderland.

[1 : 18] It's like, what is this? It's all pictures. And yet, when we come to this particular part here, Revelation 22, we are in the middle of seven scenes in Revelation, where we get to see the drama behind the drama.

In other words, there's something going on in the backdrop of where we live that we cannot see with these eyes. For us, it's not seeing is believing, but rather believing is seeing.

And we are looking at, God is giving us a glimpse of what's happening behind the scenes. He's telling us what is going on now, and what has not yet transpired, but will.

So there's somewhat of a double meaning in Revelation, in particular this section here, where we see paradise restored.

The passage from Revelation 19 to chapter 22 is all about seven visions of ultimate reality. We think we know what's going on.

[2 : 30] We look at the events in China. We see COVID. We hear about the wars around the world and all of the difficulties and challenges and diseases and problems and the riots and all of that.

And that is what's happening here. But there's much more going on in the heavenly realms and in the realm, in the spiritual realm, behind the scenes.

And so what John has been given the privilege of doing is to write down the things that he sees in the way that God tells him, so that we have a sense that God is in control.

That's the ultimate message in the book of Revelation. Jesus is in charge, and everything's going to be okay.

If you want to know, you want to wrap it up, that's what Revelation is about. You know, you want to get into the details. Is he talking about, are locusts referring to helicopters, you know, what's the symbol?

[3 : 34] That's irrelevant compared to the main idea that King Jesus is in charge, and everything's going to be okay. And we are on the winning side.

We are on the winning side. So in chapter 19 to chapter 21, verse 8, what he unfolds for us are the final judgments of the world.

In verses 1 through 10 of chapter 19, we see the final celebration. In chapter 20, 1 through 10, we see the final elimination of evil.

And I'll tell you, there are days when I get a glimpse of the news, or I read about something that's happened, or some atrocious event that's occurred in a family that I know.

I think, thank God for the promise that vengeance is mine, says the Lord. He's going to make it right. And I can't wait. There are times when I just wish it would happen now.

[4 : 35] With all the evil that is perpetrated, that's going on, it's like God, you know, bring it, make it so. That, you know, the Lord come quickly, Maranatha, that's the sense of what it is.

Hurry up and get here and make things right. Yeah. Yeah. That's right. Amen. Amen. Amen. Then in chapter 20, verses 11 through 15, we see the final judgments coming on the world.

Yay. And then chapter 21, verses 1 through 8, the final creation and celebration. So we live in the now, but we also live in the sense of the not yet.

Things are unfolding behind the backdrop of what God has put before us. There's a great veil or a curtain. And Paul had the privilege of being able to see what was behind the veil.

We don't. We don't get to see it except what's written here in the book of Revelation. In 21, verses 9 through 27 is the final city. And by the way, that final city is a reference to the fulfillment of what God originally intended in Eden.

[5 : 58] Because he created a paradise land called Eden. And there he put a garden. Yay. Yeah, I love gardens, don't you? Yay. Garden of Eden.

And there was a paradise, but it wasn't going to always be the garden. Garden. Because the idea was God was going to work through his people to create a new city.

There was a garden city. A paradise city. So you have a garden city with God's people in it. But we know Adam and Eve messed up. They sinned against God.

And the rest is history. But God is going to bring back. He's going to bring to completion what he started in the garden. And he's going to bring it out so that there is a city.

A garden city. And the citizens of that city happen to be God's people. Both from the Old Testament and the New. Those who have gone before us.

[6 : 57] And those who are still alive. Those of us who know Christ. We are citizens of that city. And we will usher in. We will enter in.

But the thing about chapter 21. About the final city. And in chapter 22. The final paradise that we'll see in a moment. Is that we are now in that final city.

And we get to see when it's going to be complete. And so what God's message is. And you've gone through the book of Ephesians. God's message is.

That we are the building blocks of the temple. That's placed in the middle of the city. But we also make up the city itself. Because it's not a city of building blocks itself.

But it's a city made up of God's people. Us. So that when the world is looking. The world ought to be able to look at the church. And see the coming city.

[7 : 57] And we think oh dear God. Is that what they really see? That's the intent. That God has placed us here on earth. To be the visible city.

Shining on the hill. Not America. Not England. You know. Not places in Africa. But God. God's people. That final city. That we radiate the beauty and the glory of God himself.

And so that people will see that city. All right. Father. May you enlighten us. As we look at Revelation 22. Verses 1 through 5. Help us to come to grips with the message.

That we would be encouraged. By the promises that you have. And that Lord. We would come to grips with who Jesus is.

And the reality that's going on even behind the scenes. That our hearts might be emboldened. And made more courageous. And not so focused on what's going on in the world at the moment.

[9 : 04] We pray this in your name. Amen. Revelation 22 verses 1 through 5 is what we're looking at. Then the angel showed me.

This is John who writes the revelation. There was only one revelation. Showed me. The river of the water of life. Bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Through the middle of the street of the city. Also on either side of the river. The tree of life. With its 12 kinds of fruit. Yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for healing the nations. 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 see his face. And his name will be on their foreheads. And the night. The night will be no more. And they will need no light of lamp or sun. For the Lord God will be their light.

[10 : 08] And they will reign forever and ever. Amen. One of the things. If you really want to understand the book of Revelation.

You have to understand the Old Testament. Bottom line. Because we can't take our 21st century view. And look at Revelation and interpret that way.

We have to look at it from that biblical perspective. And mostly from the prophetic language of the Old Testament. Found in Ezekiel and Daniel.

And many other places in the Old. And the vision that we have here. Is the themes. I don't know if you picked up on it. But the themes that we have here. In this chapter. Are themes that are found in Genesis 1, 2, and 3.

The tree of life. The river that flows from it. You know. The main area. The throne. And that is very much like it was in the Garden of Eden.

[11:05] Where God met Adam and Eve. You know. And they came to confer with him. And hear what he had to say. And live according to his will.

And so he was the central place. And Adam and Eve relished in that. And we see other things that we find in the Old Testament. Not only the tree of life.

And the river. With the 12 kinds of fruit. Yielding fruit every month. And the leaves for the healing of the nations. That's a promise that Israel always looked forward to.

That God kept bringing up. Is that Israel would provide the healing for all nations. And that ultimately God would gather from all over the world.

And call people to himself. Through his people. For the healing of the nations. It's interesting though.

[12:03] That the nations always go somewhere else. Looking for healing. When God is saying. It's through me. That I get through my people.

That you may be healed. And we see again the throne of God. The Lamb. Who will be in it. His servants will worship him.

Which is the ultimate point of our lives. Is to worship him day and night. They will see his face. His name will be on the foreheads. It's not a literal thing.

When in the Old Testament. It talks about. God will imprint or stamp. Or put a. Will stamp upon our foreheads. It means that we will think the thoughts of God.

And that he will put his name upon our hands. It means that we will do the will of God. It's not a literal thing. That we'll have. You know that the unbelievers will have the 666 or anything.

[13:00] It's a figurative thing. It's a symbolic thing. And those who are truly in him already have. We have our heads. And our hands stamped.

By God himself. And the night will be no more. Because he is the light. So all of these things are already brought up in the Old Testament. Time and again.

And now he brings it all to. To a point. To a head. And what's the deal here. The first thing that we see in verses 1 and 2.

Is the water of life in the city. He showed me a pure river. Water of water of life. Clear as crystal. Proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb.

And in the middle of the street. And on either side of the river. Was the tree. Zechariah 14.8 said. In that day shall come living waters. Which shall flow from Jerusalem.

[13:59] Half of them toward the east. And half of them towards the western sea. Both in the summer and the winter it will occur. It's a theme. And it's a promise. Especially if you live out in the wilderness.

Or in the desert. You want some kind of source of water. But it's not a literal thing. What he's talking about is. Is Jesus who said I am the living waters. From me will come living waters.

He is that rock. That provided the water. To the people in the wilderness. He's the ultimate one. He is the one. From which we get.

Constant refreshment. Eco 47 gives us a picture of the influence. And salvation of the coming Messiah. Of Jesus. Coming out of Jerusalem.

Extending to the whole world. And it's a great and glorious effect. Of the life giving nature. Of the good news. The river is only in the city.

[15:04] And the city again. Is God's people. The church. Ultimately we will have. A real new heavens. And a new earth. But we.

In the middle of the church. Worldwide. We call it Catholic. Meaning universal. In the past. Present and future. In heaven and on earth.

Is God's people. And Jesus is in the middle of it. And from him flows. This life giving water. Water. When Jesus hung upon the cross.

And he was. Speared. It says out of him came. Water. Now we know the physiological. Reason for that. But for centuries.

The church has understood that. As Jesus being the one. Who gives the life giving water. That's not only refreshment. But sustenance. We can't go very long without water.

[16:04] And we can't go very long without. Jesus. The water himself. But that's a promise. That he offers to the nations. It comes. Through him. To us.

And to the nations. Do you see the picture. That we have. That. There's. There's. We are important to God. But we are important to the nations. Because we have something to give.

Something to offer. And that is Jesus. Who is the living water. Then in verse. Verses. Two through four. We have the tree of life.

Which goes back to. The garden of Eden. Remember there were two trees. The tree of life. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And in the tree of life. Is something that.

The idea was. When. When. Adam and Eve. Had they passed the test. They failed it. And don't be upset with him.

[17:00] Because. Being an Adam. We would have done the same thing. But had they passed the test. The picture that we get from. Parts of the Old Testament. And in Revelation.

Is that they would have been able to take. From this tree of life. And lived into eternity. And built up the world. That God had intended.

The vision that he had. On heaven. Would be on earth. And at some point. In the future. God would bring it all to a close. And usher that.

This world. Even as good as it would have been. Into a new heavens. And a new earth. Because that's the ultimate. Design for eternity. So they would have had. Eating the leaves.

Or the fruit of it. Or whatever. They could have. Lasted a very long time. And this is. A theologian say. This is one of the reasons. Why he kicked them out of the garden. Is because he didn't want them.

[17:56] To last forever. In the state of sin. But here we have the tree of life. In the city. And it's Christ. Within the church.

That mankind. Will be able to enjoy. The saving. Healing fruit. Of the tree of life. Who is Jesus himself. Now what is this tree?

The tree by the way. The literal term. That is used. Is wood. Wood. Wood. And it's the same reference.

That the cross is often. Referred to as wood. The wood. The tree. He hung upon the tree. Now we know he didn't. Hang upon a literal tree. But he hung upon the wood.

And there it is. That we find life. In God. In Christ. Through what Jesus did. Upon the tree. For us. And that tree. Is always there.

[18:56] Beckoning. The world. Our neighbors. Our unsaved friends. Our relatives. Our enemies. Beckoning. Them to come. And to eat.

The life. From the life-giving tree. That is Jesus himself. So you see. His. The water. The flows from him. The tree upon which he hung. That's what he's talking about here.

And then in verse three. Is we'd see this church city. It's a place where there is. No accursed thing. Can you ever imagine that? I can't even wrap my mind around.

Living in a place where there's no. Unhappiness. No sorrow. No grief. No sin. Again. And that's the promise.

God's love and authority. Are always in control. He has banished wickedness and evil. And he's put it out. So it can never again. Touch and pervert.

[19:58] Heaven or earth. And then verse four. As the church sees the glory of God in Christ. Christ. We get to see in him the radiant beauty of who.

Of who God is. It's like. Being in. The same place. That John and Peter. And James were. When Jesus.

Was transfigured. You remember reading about that. You know. None of us were there. But. You know. That. That Jesus took his three disciples.

The main leaders. Up. And. All of a sudden. He started to glow. White. He was. You know. Glowing. Brilliantly. And radiating. This glow. And. I don't know about you. But. If somebody. Started glowing. Their clothes are glowing.

[20:53] Their shoes are glowing. Their hair is glowing. Their skin is glowing. You know. I had nothing to do with. Oil of Olay. Or anything like that. I had everything to do with the radiance of God. Just.

Shining. You know. I probably pass out. And then all of a sudden. You know. We see these two. We see Moses.

And. Elijah. You know. There they are. They're glowing. With. With Jesus. And they're talking. That's why they were so excited.

Because they wanted to do something about it. Well. Here we are. We have this vision again. To live in a place where. Jesus is radiating. Glowing. But. He can.

He does that now. We just don't see it. With our eyes here. He's glowing and radiating. Radiating his glory. And he does it through the church.

[21 : 50] He does it in our lives. And. To be able to behold that. And understand it. It's one of the prayers. Again. Back in. Ephesians.

That we would actually. Behold. Jesus. In this transfigured state. And then finally. We have the reign of light.

In verse five. The rule and reign of light. There won't be any night.

It'll be kind of like. The North Pole. You know. It's always. Sunny. I. I.

Candidated for a church up in Alaska. Many years ago. Right out of seminary. And. It was over the summer. And they had to have.

[22 : 45] Curtains. You know. You know about this. Right. Curtains. To darken. Because. At eleven o'clock at night. It's still twilight. You know.

It's hard to sleep. Because it's always light. Perfect for gardening. But. You know. Not for sleep. But here it is. You know. There will be no night there. And.

Night. You know. As a symbol of darkness. As a symbol of. Of all that's despairing. And horrible. And wicked. It's gone. It's gone. And all.

Now all we have is Jesus. We have. This light. And he will reign forever and ever. Reign forever. Now he reigns by the word and spirit.

But he will reign. And so much more. Perfectly. And completely. He has vanquished. His enemies. The evil ones. Who by the way.

[23 : 39] Are our enemies too. And our enemies. Are Jesus. Our enemies. And he's dealt with them. And then finally. There's this.

This final point. In chapter 22. Where. An angel. And John. And Jesus. They all certify. This book is. Is happening now. And it will happen.

It's going on. Behind the scenes. And it will complete. Before us. And in the end. There's that promise. I am coming quickly. I am coming quickly.

Well that's the picture. So what's the point? Let me provide a couple. As I said. Revelation has a. Now and not yet.

Sense to it. So what we see here. Is. Is the conflict going on. You know. Revelation. There's this war. And battle. Between. Between the great serpent.

[24 : 39] The dragon. And. And. His cronies. You know. The orcs. And. And all the others. Those wicked. Creatures. And.

You know. The great king. Who's coming. And this is true. In this chapter too. But the ideal. Set before us. To inspire us. That. The work on earth.

Is not done yet. But. We have a part. In it. And that. Our lives. Transfixed. On Christ.

Who is beautiful. And glorious. And awesome. And healing. That offers. Living water. And life eternal. That we have a part. In that.

And we offer that. To the nations. Even our presence. Because of the work. Of the spirit. In us. Can impact. Who we touch.

[25 : 34] And instead of. You know. Like the. We can go viral. So to speak. Because of the work. Of Christ in us. Instead of having. Its ill effects. It has its healing effects. Wouldn't it be great.

To catch a virus. Like that. And get a virus. Where you're healed. Of everything. Jesus is redeeming.

He's refashioning. The universe. And the universe. Of the future. Which is. Which is going on. Is foreshadows. Is. Foreshadowed. In his people.

The church. Now that's a scary thought. But that's what he's telling us. So that the world. When they see. What's going on. Hopefully when they see.

Us. As the church. They see Jesus. And they see. What life. Can be like. And what it will be like. In the future. And we have a part of that.

[26 : 33] It's not yet. A reality. For us. But it is. A reality. In the backdrop. Behind the scenes. So we have. What's happening now.

We have a picture. What Jesus is doing. Through his temple. The church. And his city. The citizens. The church. Where the water of life.

Flows from Jesus. Who is the center. And as I was thinking about this. Reflecting on it. You know. I'm Facebook friends.

With maybe. 400 people. From Africa. And their world. Is really. A lot different. You know. They live. You know.

Some live in. Literal mud huts. Others live in houses. That look just like ours. Depending where they're at. But their perspective. Obviously. Is different. Because their culture.

[27 : 28] Is different. Right. But even as Christians. Their culture. And their viewpoint. Is different. And I think about the American church. And what's happened over. You know.

All these years. Especially since. The end of the 50s. Where we have tried really hard. To impress the world. So we've done everything we can.

As a church. We have seminars. And conferences. And we have. Church growth movements. And we have. All these programs. And these. The celebrity pastors. And all that.

But the fact of the matter is. You know. The message here. That encouraged the church. Who were persecuted. Back then. That ought to encourage us. As American citizens.

And American people. Who are still. Citizens of the church. Is it's not about. The pastor. It's not about the elders. It's not about the programs. It's not about the family.

[28 : 24] It's not about the fathers. And the family. It's not about. The activities. It's not even about the Bible. Because. We can.

We need to be careful. We don't idolize the Bible. Because the Bible. Is God's word. Who tells us about Jesus. It's about Jesus. And when we begin to.

Make us. Reflect all these other things. That the world looks at us. And says. You're not doing it. Any better than we are. You know. What do you have to offer. But instead.

When we reflect Jesus. Who is central. They don't have that in the world. They have nothing like it. Around them. And that.

That. As Jesus is the light. It does one of two things. It either blinds them. And repulses them. They can't take it. Or it attracts them. Jesus is our ultimate sustenance.

[29 : 24] And refreshment. And he's the centerpiece. Of the church. And anything else. Is superfluous. And. Sometimes. Illegitimate.

It's the water. That flows from Christ. To us. Through us. To others. Who are desperately thirsty. In this temple city.

The church really has the tree of life. Because we have the cross. It has been done. The death on the cross. Has given us life. To overcome. The curse.

And that's. The message that we see in verse four. Now. That's what's happening now. And that ought to give us hope. Because our hope is in Christ.

And Christ is in us. And Christ is in the church. And that we have something to say. And something to offer. Not our talents. You know. Not our abilities.

[30 : 20] Not. Not anything else. But we have. Jesus. To show. But what's to happen? This is. The second part. That ought to encourage us.

Regardless. Of how horrible. Life. Gets. For Christians. In John 14. Jesus said. I go. To prepare. A place for you. And that's what he's doing. So he has something. To look forward to. You know.

The mansion. Has many rooms. You know. It's. It's a.

It's a. Big. Big. Big. House. And a big. Big. City. And a big. Big. Lot. Called the garden. And it's a garden city. And he has gone. To prepare a place. And we can look forward to.

The new heavens. And the new earth. And some of our. Brothers and sisters. Even here. In this. In this church. Have already gone. You know.

[31 : 14] They get. They get to see. They get to experience. Some of what it's like. But the fact of the matter. Is what. What John is saying here. What Jesus is saying here.

When we taste. Christ. And we taste. The sweet fellowship. Of Christ. With one another. We have a. Foretaste. Of what.

Life is going to be like. In the new heavens. And new earth. When we. Present. Jesus. And the reality. Of Christ. Within us. And around us.

As a church. It's like. Going into the kitchen. As the. You know. Turkey's being carved up. And you know. You take a little bit here. And a little bit there. And you get a taste. Of what it's going to be. And we can say. To the world. Come and taste. And see. That the Lord is good. It's going to happen. There is a space. And a place. In eternity.

[32 : 10] And he's going to bring it. And he's going to bring us. To it. And it will be. A new earth. And a new heavens. And we're. We're not going to float. You know.

With disembodied. Spirits. With these. Strange. No offense to musicians. But strange harps. You know. That's not. Not the vision.

Of the future. At all. But we will always have. A pure. And perfect. Water of life. And Jesus. And his tree. Will always provide us. And he will give us.

New bodies. To live on this new earth. And in the new heaven. And we will be. Loving it. In that new city. So when we are. On the verge of despair.

And we are tired. Of what's happening. In the world. This is what he is saying. Don't look. At what's around us. Look at what's.

[33 : 05] Before us. Because that's the promise. That he gives. In Christ. And through Christ. And we. Have a part. In it. There's great hope.

Father. It's difficult. You've given us. A moving. Picture. Kind of a film.

In. In this book. Of what it's. Like now. With Christ. In us. And around us. And before us. And in our. In the church. Help us. To capture that vision. While at the same time. Doing what we need to do.

And saying what we need to say.

And living how we need to live. In Christ. That we can anticipate. The much better. The much more. That you offer. We know that we are.

[34 : 01] Not yet there. But we will be. May that encourage our hearts. As we anticipate. A new year. We don't know what it's going to.

What will. Come about. It's been a long. Hard year. For the world. Not only with COVID. But conflicts.

And wars. And threat of wars. And all that. But help us. To fix our eyes. On Christ. And the hope. That he has. And the new heavens. And new earth.

We get to be in. Amen. Amen.