

19. The Great Story which never ends

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[0 : 00] Now let's pray for a moment before we turn to the Scriptures. God our Father, how we praise you that you have things to say to us.

We believe that they are things that we need to hear. And so give to us open ears, and may we experience what the disciples long ago experienced on the Emmaus Road, that our hearts may burn, that our eyes may be opened, and you will send us out into the world with this message of the Spirit and the Bride calling people to come.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. To travel, hopefully, said R.L. Stevenson, is a better thing than to arrive.

And I suspect when many of us think of the world to come, we sometimes are afraid there is going to be some kind of anticlimax. But we look for it, we long for it, somehow or other it may not live up to expectation.

A group of Christians were making their way towards a Christian convention. It was wintertime, the middle of December, not the best time of year possibly to hold such a meeting.

[1 : 24] This was many years ago, and they had an accident on the way. Mercifully, no one was hurt. Now, when they eventually arrived at their destination, and their friends were relieved to see them, the driver of the car said, we really had a most lucky escape this evening.

We almost ended up in the glory. And I think that is how many of us think of the world to come. A lucky escape.

We almost ended up in the glory. Now, I think the word glory in itself is a very good word. This used to be used many years ago by Christians speaking of the world to come.

Because as I was saying last week, the world to come is not the shadowlands. Not some kind of disembodied existence. The world to come is the place of the unveiled and unending glory of Christ.

We will be with him. We will be like him. For we will see him as he is. And one of the reasons we don't particularly want to go is because of the narrow and impoverished way we often think of the world to come.

[2 : 39] Now, here, of course, it is a return to Eden, first of all, isn't it? The river of the water of life. The bookends of the Bible both speak of the river flowing.

This time it flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. But it is Eden in double measure, so to speak. There are two trees of life, not just one.

This is a deeper country. This is the country of God's unveiled and unending splendor to which he has called all his people.

And the river is the Spirit himself. Rather like Ezekiel had centuries before seen a river of water flowing from the temple to irrigate the lands around the Dead Sea.

And this is a chapter of great truths. Commentators tend to fizzle out after verse 5, which is the culmination of the New Jerusalem.

[3 : 36] And they talk about the epilogue as if it was simply a collection of pious statements. Now, I don't believe that at all. This epilogue here, from verses 6 to 21, as we'll see, is full of amazing and great truths.

This is the beginning of the great story, which never ends. Now, what's its point to us? The point to us, surely, is to help us to see how it's all going to end.

At the moment, it doesn't look as if it's going to end very well, does it? At the moment, when we think of our own church and the dreadful mess in which we find ourselves, when we think of the crises in the world, it doesn't look as if God is in control.

These chapters are saying, look, God is in control. This is going to happen. Indeed, it's already happening. And one day, it will be fully experienced.

These are great truths in the great story that never ends. Three particular great truths. First of all, verses 1 to 5, a perfect home.

[4 : 52] I say this echoes Eden, but it goes far deeper. Because here, this is the homeland. The homeland of which we have glimpses in this world.

Think of all the places you love. Think of the people you love most. Think of the things you enjoy most. These are glimpses of the glory that is to come.

Now, if you were to try and explain to people, why do you love this place rather than that? Why do you love this person rather than that one? We could, of course, give reasons, but none of them would get really to the heart of it.

Because the heart of it is that these are places which hold our heart. These are our heartland places. This and this place here, the city of God, is the place to which all his people belong and to which they are going.

This is a place with the reversal of the curse. None of the things that spoil this world are there any longer. The river of life. The river of life.

[5 : 59] The tree of life. Healing and blessing. So what is it then about this perfect home? First of all, this is a place of seeing and of belonging.

His servants will serve him. And they will see his face. Verse 4. His name will be on their foreheads. Now, in one sense, of course, we shall see him as terrifying.

Now, what happened to John? And he saw him at the beginning of the book. When I saw him, I fell at his feet like one dead. It will be terrifying, but also enormously reassuring.

Because remember what the risen Lord said to John back then. Do not be afraid. I have the keys of death and of the world to come. And as John himself says in his first letter, When we see him, we shall be like him.

It will be terrifying, of course, to see him now. In our fallen, in our polluted state. But when we see him, we shall be like him. Or we shall see him as he is.

[7 : 09] One of my early memories is of my father taking me to visit an old saint. Now, when I say an old saint, I don't mean anything sentimental. This was a tough old battle axe.

As tough as old boots. She had lived a very, very hard life for many, many years. And she was totally blind. I can't remember now whether I was told this afterwards or whether I actually heard her saying this.

I rather think I actually heard this. This was many years ago. Someone else was there and they said something like, It's a great pity. You've never actually seen any of your family or friends.

Her reply was, The first face I see will be Jesus. That was her radiant faith. As in, it wasn't a sentimental woman at all. But she had lived and she died shortly afterwards in that faith.

The first face I see will be Jesus. And not only will we see him, We will belong there.

[8 : 10] His servants will worship him. Or his servants will serve him. Same word can be translated differently. Because heaven, while it will be rest, Will not be idleness.

It will be creative, fulfilling activity. I believe one of the things that will be true about the world to come is that those things, those good things, Which were thwarted in this life, Will come to fullness in the world to come.

His servants will serve him. His servants will worship him. We will see him. And our eyes at last shall see him. Through his own redeeming love. And we will belong.

His name will be on their foreheads. Remember earlier in the book, People had on their foreheads the mark of the beast. This is not the mark of the beast. This is the mark of the lamb.

The one who died for us. Seeing and belonging. But what else about this perfect home? Well, darkness and fear have gone. Night will be no more.

[9 : 17] Now, as I said last week, When we were talking about the sea and so on, This does not necessarily mean There will be, There won't be morning or evening. Because remember, In the unfallen world, There was morning and evening.

What associates night with evil? It is sin and the curse and fallenness, isn't it? John says in his gospel, Men love darkness rather than light. Because their deeds are evil.

In other words, We are not being given astronomical And geographical information About the new creation. We are being told there will be No darkness and no fear.

Because the night, after all, Is associated with fears. Who here has not lain awake sometimes at night And been afraid? You hear creaks in the house, And if you lie awake in the dark In the middle of the night, We all know those kind of gloomy thoughts That flood into our minds And we can't get rid of them.

That will all be gone. No darkness, No fear. And they will reign forever and ever. Now once again, That takes us right back To the beginning of our Bible.

[10 : 25] Adam and Eve were created To reign over God's creation. They were appointed To be God's representatives in creation.

In the new creation, Redeemed humanity will reign. And that will mean that creation itself Will be blessed. As Romans 8 says, When fallen humanity, When those who turn to Christ Are fully redeemed by Him, Then the ancient mandate To rule creation Will be taken up.

You see, God doesn't change His mind. God made this creation. God loves this creation. God will remake it. And in that creation, He will place those Redeemed men and women Who will take up and carry out Perfectly the task That Adam and Eve failed to do.

It doesn't mean sitting, It doesn't mean sitting, Lording it over people. It means carrying out Our full destiny To rule the new heaven And the new earth. Perfect home.

Now, in this world, We all love to have a place We can call home, Don't we? When you're tired, And when you're in the midst Of a great deal of turmoil Or hard work, The thought of home Keeps you going.

[11 : 40] And so, But there is a perfect home Beyond this. So that's the first thing then. And the second great reality Is a faithful word.

Verse 6, He said to me, These words are trustworthy And true. It's not altogether easy To work out exactly Who is speaking in these verses, Whether the angel, John himself, But the important thing is, These are the words Of the risen Lord.

The whole of the book Comes from the Lord himself. And verse 6 shows this. Whether angel, prophet, Or John himself, These are trustworthy And true words.

Because they are the words Of the Lord. This is the master's voice. The book is an authentic Words from God. And remember, This is to be read In the churches.

I, Jesus, Verse 16, Have sent my angel To testify to use things For the churches. When we looked at The seven churches A long time ago now, I emphasized That the seven churches, The whole book Is a letter To the seven churches.

[12 : 53] Chapters 2 and 3 Have, if you like, Individual notes To each of the churches. This whole book Is about the triumph Of the Lamb. About the world to come. And how that means We can live for him In this world.

So, let's explore A little bit This idea Of the trustworthy word. First of all, What's being emphasized Is the truth Of the prophetic word.

As we've seen, Revelation echoes So much of the Old Testament. Scarcely a phrase In this book That doesn't refer To somewhere In the Old Testament. Interestingly, As I've said before, Hardly any direct quotations.

But every phrase Almost an allusion To the earlier scriptures. In verses 6 and 7 Are saying You can believe These scriptures. These are trustworthy And true.

Rather, As Peter has said In his second letter, A light shining In a dark place. Now, you see What's being said here. These words Are trustworthy And true For the whole church Throughout its Earthly pilgrimage.

[14 : 02] There never has been A church on earth. There never will be A church on earth That can neglect Or belittle These words. This is the message Of God.

Whatever people may say Nowadays Or at any other time. This is the message By which All other messages Must be judged. And unless We are faithful To this word, Not only It's not simply A question of Disobeying this verse And that verse.

If we are not Obeying this word Then we are rejecting The gospel in total. That's what's being said. Something to hold on to Amid the shifting currents Of opinion And the positive Cataract of unfaithfulness And disbelief Which is Raining down upon us.

So that's the first thing. The prophetic word. The trustworthy word. Is the guide for us In this world. We do not go beyond it Because if we go beyond it As he says earlier on If we take away from it Then we are going to Find ourselves Heading not to this city But to the city of destruction.

But then there is more than that. Look at verses 8 and 9 again. I John am the one Who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them I fell down to worship At the feet of the angel Who showed them to me.

[15 : 24] John had done this before In chapter 19. He wanted to worship the angel But the angel 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. Now do you see What the angel is saying? The angel is saying Isn't just about Being faithful To the words of a book. It's about being faithful To the living word To whom this book points.

And that is why We have a repetition And it's not an idle repetition It's a deliberate repetition Of what Jesus has said At the beginning of the book.

Verse 39 The Alpha and the Omega The first and the last The beginning and the end. What the Lord Jesus Christ Is saying I'm the subject Of the whole book From Genesis 1 To Revelation 22 And failure To obey that book To listen to that word Is actually failure To obey me.

It's not It's ultimately The authority of the Bible Is not about a book It's about the living word Who speaks through the book. The heart of the big picture Of the Bible.

[16 : 41] Alpha and the Omega The first and the last. The heart of the historical part Of the Bible. Verse 18 I am the root And the descendant Of David.

The one through whom All God's purposes In history Are going to be fulfilled. So The trustworthy word Is trustworthy Because it leads us Fully, faithfully To the living word Will never deceive us About him Will never lead us Astray from him.

That's why It's so important. And that's the word Verse 7 We have to keep. Keep the words Of the prophecy Of this book. Now by extension Of course And Revelation Draws so heavily From the Bible This in many ways Is the Is saying Keep the authority Of the whole Of Scripture Itself.

How do we keep That authority? Do we do what Used to be done Chain Bibles In churches Make sure That no one Could read them By having them In languages No one can understand?

No. Verse 17 Tells us How we are to Keep these words. The spirit And the bride Say come And let the one Who hears Say come And let the one Who is thirsty Come Let the one Who desires Take the water Of life Without price.

[18 : 06] How is the church To keep this word? The church is to Keep this word As they say Come As they bring That message Into the world. This is the church In the power Of the spirit Bringing the words Of the prophecy Of this book To the world.

Now of course The spirit Is not limited To us. The spirit Can work As and when He wills. But the main way The spirit works To bring the word Of life To the world Is through The people Of God.

And that's What I think Is being said Here. The spirit And the bride Say come. Let him Who hears Say come. That's to say Every new person Who hears Hears in the true Biblical sense Not just of Listening to But of obeying And believing.

Then they say Come to others And let the one Who is thirsty Come. Let the one Whose deepest Longings Are unsatisfying. Let the one Who is longing For this Perfect home.

The one Who is longing For a trustworthy Word. Let them come. That verse Verse 17 Is one of the Most beautiful Pictures in the Whole Bible Of the church Bringing the Word to the World.

[19 : 19] Brings it in The power of The spirit. It's shared As each new Person hears it. And it Corresponds to the Deepest longings Of the human Heart. Picking up here From Isaiah 55 Everyone who is Thirsty Let them come To the waters.

The gospel Is the Invitation To come And drink The living Water. But of course In every age The gospel Is warning As well as Invitation.

Verse 18 I warn Everyone who Hears the Words of The prophecy Of this Book. Now Throughout History There have Been two Ways to Distort and Ignore the Words of This book.

There is First of all The gospel Plus. If anyone Adds to Them. This is the Gospel on All kinds of Human additions. Things which Don't belong to The heart of The gospel.

Particular Emphasies. Particular Ideas that May have been Right in Particular times And places. But don't Belong to The core Of the Gospel. And the Other error Of course Is the Gospel Minus.

[20 : 32] If anyone Takes away From the Words of The book Of this Prophecy. We see this In all the New Testament Letters don't We? In the Letters to The Galatians People are Adding to The gospel.

The gospel Of grace Is not Enough. They said You have To be Circumcised. You have To follow The regulations. Other places They were Taking away From the Gospel The way Of liberalism Taking The gospel To be Inadequate.

Both These ways Do. Because the Gospel Is ultimately The only Message That can Save And satisfy The human Heart.

That's why These terrifying Threats The plagues Take away His share On the Tree Of Life And in The Holy City. Jesus Christ The first Word And the Last Word Which is The title I've given To this Whole series In Revelation.

So how do We know About all These glories Of the World to Come? How do We invite People To the World to Come? How do We warn Them to Escape From Babylon The city Of destruction?

[21 : 45] It's by Presenting The living Word The spirit And the Bride Say Come Invitation And Warning. And that Leads us On to The third Great Truth Here.

Not only Do we Have Not only Do we Have A perfect Home Not only Do we Have a Faithful Word But we Have A returning Christ. See there Is more.

The Bible Is to Fall Into Expectant Silence With the Best Yet To Come. If you Read the Bible a lot You'll Notice how Many Books of The Bible End on An Unfinished Note Because there Is more To come.

In the book Of Genesis Jacob In a Coffin In Egypt Doesn't Sound Very Promising Until we Go on to The book Of Exodus And discover How that How these Bones are Going to be Taken to the Promised land And are a Foretaste of The world To come.

The book of Acts Ends with Paul In his Own house. We saw this Some months ago And he Was taking Us Through that Book. Why? Because the Work of The gospel Goes on.

[22 : 51] It didn't End with Paul. So the Bible falls Into expectant Silence. There is more To happen. Twice. Verse 12 And verse 20.

I am coming Soon. The ancient Aramaic prayer Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Maranatha. The prayer that the Early Christians Prayed as they Encourage each Other in the Struggles and Difficulties and Trials of their Daily life and When they met Around the Lord's table.

As often as You eat this Bread and drink This cup you Proclaim the Lord's death Until he Comes. And that is The fulfilment Of one of the Most ancient Prophecy of All.

I often ask The Cornhill Students Where is the First mention Of the second Coming in the Bible? And of Course it is Genesis 3.15 Isn't it? The descendant Of the woman Will crush The head Of the serpent.

Now at that Point of course We have no Idea who the Descendant is. We have no Idea for there To be one or More comings. The ancient Promise is Going to be Fulfilled. I am Coming Soon.

[24 : 01] Nineteen Centuries Have rolled On. And In these During that Time many Have said Where is the Coming that He promised But Why does The apostle Say soon?

He says soon Because the First coming Introduced the Last days The last days Which is God's Final word And with God Of course One day Is as a Thousand years And a Thousand years As a day And the Resurrection Of Jesus Began the Irreversible Movement To the New heaven And the New earth Soon In that Sense It is Absolutely Certain And in God's Time It is Fixed And it Will Happen But the Question is How can We be Prepared Because there Is a Final word Yet Isn't there In verse 21 If we Are not Christian How can We be Prepared How can We be Prepared To meet Him And to Face Him If we Are Christian Are we Sure We are Going to Make It How do We know We will Not Fall Away That Seems To me To the Point Of This

Last Verse The Grace Of The Lord Jesus Be With Us All A Reminder This Is a Real Letter To Real People What Do Real People Need In order To In order That This Is all Going To Be True Well First Of All We need The Grace That Saves Us It Is Grace Through Faith Which Brings Us Into The Kingdom And Destines Us For This Wonderful Glory How Are We Going To Keep Going It It's Grace That Brought Us Safe Thus Far And Grace Will Lead Us Home Grace And Grace Will Bring Us To Glory And That's Why It Seems To Me The Bible Ends With The Greatest Of All Truths Now We Sang That Wonderful Hymn At The Beginning The Hymn Of Newman The Second Adam To The Fight And To The Rescue Came We Missed That One Verse

Because It's Very Unfortunate Let me Someone Else Rewrite The Verse Because It's Got Some Good Things That Grace Should Flesh And Blood Refine Brothers And Sisters There Is No Higher Gift Than Grace Because Grace As Newman Goes On To See Is God's Presence And His Very Self And That Is What Awaits Us In The Day To Come Let's Give The Last Word In This Sermon Not In Scripture But To Someone Whose Name I Don't Even Need To Mention Now At Last They Were Beginning Chapter One Of The Great Story Which No One On Earth Has Read Which Goes On Forever In Which Every Chapter Is Better Than The One Before Amen Let's Pray The

Spirit And The Bride Say Come And Let The One Who Hears Say Come Father We Are All Thirsty We Are Thirsty For Things This World Can Never Satisfy How We Praise You For Those Little Glimpses Of Eternal Life That You Give To Us In These Days Even Here And Now And We Pray That Each One Of Us May Live Here Rejoicing In The Knowledge Of The Glory To Come And Rejoicing In The Grace That U Holds Us Until That Day Dawns We Ask This In The Name Of Our Lord Jesus Christ Amen deserve Oh You Have You Have D Un

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