

A Tale of Two Cities - Part 2: Jerusalem the Eternal Garden City

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're turning now to our Bibles and reading together in the very last book of the Bible, John's Vision in Revelation. If you don't have a Bible, there's some church Bibles at the sides, at the front, at the back.

You can grab one. I think in those Bibles it's page 1041. But I can pretty much tell you it's on about the last page of whatever Bible it is that you have.

And we're going to read together this morning from chapter 21, the beginning through to verse 5 of chapter 22 of Revelation. So Revelation 21 then, verse 1.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them. And they will be his people.

[1 : 1 6] And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

And he said, Write this down. For these words are trustworthy and true. And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage.

And I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

[2 : 3 5] Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper clear as crystal.

It had a great high wall with twelve gates and at the gates twelve angels. And on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.

On the east gates three, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and its walls. The city lies four square, its length the same as its width.

- [3 : 46] And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.
- He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear of glass.
- The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysopress, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.
- And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.
- And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.
- [5 : 08] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there.
- They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.
- Then the angel 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. And also on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.
- The leaves of the tree are for the healing of 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, and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads, and night will be no more.
- They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
- [6 : 36] Amen. May God bless to us His word. Well, good morning, friends.
- Please have those verses of Revelation 21 open in front of you this morning. It's our penultimate sermon in this book.
- We'll finish next week with chapter 22, but Revelation 21 this morning. The future of God's people is truly wonderful, truly beautiful.
- Christians have real hope for the future, and these concluding chapters of Revelation set before us the glorious reality which will one day be ours, which will one day be yours.
- This is your future. And here's the thing. That glorious future that awaits us fundamentally and radically impacts our presence.
- [7 : 44] Where we are headed, our destiny changes everything about here and now. Because understanding our destiny helps us to make the right choices now.
- It will mean that we prioritize the right things. It will mean that we let go of the things that we cling to too tightly. We'll let go of them. It will mean that we make decisions on a very different basis than the basis that those around us make decisions.
- It will mean that we will be prepared to suffer now for the sake of Christ because of what will come. Our future changes everything about how we live now.
- And these chapters give us a glimpse of what awaits us. And although we perhaps would love to have more detail about what it will be like, we are given enough here.

God's word is sufficient for life and godliness. Everything we need to know is in his word. And his word is sufficient to keep us going. And these wonderful visions here at the end of this glorious book give us enough to keep us going.

[9 : 01] There is enough here to help us not to compromise. There is enough here to keep us going in this temporary world. There is enough here to live a joyful life as travelers in this world which is marked by so much suffering and sin.

There is enough here to keep you going. So soak in these words this morning. Let them fill your vision and fill your heart and thrill your heart because these paragraphs describe our destiny.

This is where we are headed. And the last word of God's word is joy. The joy of an eternal salvation. The joy of full redemption.

The joy of becoming all that we were meant to be. The joy of being with our Lord and our Savior. That is where we are going. That is how this great book ends.

And that is our future hope. And what a contrast to the vision offered by our world. What answer do we find in our society in our culture about the future?

[10 : 11] What hope is offered to us? I was speaking to somebody recently whose daughter was graduating from an art school in London I think. I forget the details but she was graduating from art school.

It is the end of year end of course exhibition. All the students pulled together their work over the few years they have been studying and they pulled it together for this final exhibition.

And some esteemed figure from the art world helped curate it and they wrote an introduction for the brochure that you get when you go in to look at this exhibition.

So he wrote the introduction but it made pretty bleak reading. He essentially summed up the message of the exhibition in terms of the future of our world and his message at the end of this introduction to this exhibition was this everything is terrible.

Keep going. That was the great hope that these art students had come to. Everything is terrible.

[11 : 15] And no wonder that was the overall message of the exhibition. Our culture pumps out a message of doom and destruction at every opportunity. It is not the imminent collapse of the climate it is the cult of death seeking to limit life at its inception and at its end.

It is the politics of power the abuse of power everywhere we look hopelessness. What hope is offered to us as we look to our leaders our politicians our world is crying out for hope isn't it?

For a future worth living for. Well that is what we have in God's word in contrast to the answers the world offers here is real hope.

And not only is the vision held out in the Bible here in Revelation not only is it good and beautiful it is also true and eternal. These chapters mark the end of the story at least in terms of this sin sick world.

In reality this is only the beginning. This is the beginning of eternity. As C.S. Lewis puts it in *The Last Battle* Now at last they are beginning chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth had ever read which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before.

[12 : 41] And that is the glimpse we are given here in Revelation 21-22. It is the beginning of an unending beautiful story where every chapter is better than the one before.

That friends is our great hope. that is your destiny. That is what will keep you going now in this world. So let's dip into some of these details and friends there is so much to say here.

This is such a rich passage. I want to give you the broad brushstrokes. I am sure there will be questions afterwards but let's just soak in the big picture here. And notice firstly verses 1-8 we see the new heavens and the new earth.

Now there is a lot of detail up to this point in Revelation about the destruction of evil. It has been a sober read hasn't it? As we have read through these chapter of Revelation chapter after chapter about the judgment that will one day surely fall.

And the message is clear as we saw last week evil will come to an end. Satan will meet his destiny. Jesus will judge everyone and everything.

[13 : 51] Justice will be done. But what will be left? When justice falls what will be left? Is it all doom and destruction?

Well no. God will do something new. That's a repeated word in these opening verses isn't it? New. New heaven. New earth.

New Jerusalem. The voice from the throne verse 5 declares behold I'm making all things new. So in what way will things be new?

When Jesus comes in what sense will everything be new? The new heavens and new earth it is more of a purification and a cleansing a remaking of this world rather than a complete annihilation of everything and a totally new creation.

No no. The picture is one of renewal of recreation and the future is a material future it's a physical thing it's not some sort of ethereal mystical reality it's an earthly material future and there is a degree of continuity between the old and the new it is the same heaven and earth but gloriously transformed and transfigured into a new thing remade transformed and we're told something of what won't be there and what will be there so what won't be there in this new creation this new heavens and earth what will not be there?

[15 : 24] Well three things in particular no sea no suffering no sin so first no sea look at end of verse one the first heaven and the first earth are passed away and the sea was no more now what does that mean?

perhaps you enjoy surfing and that's a bit of a thought no more sea well remember that in revelation the sea has particular meanings in revelation the sea is the origin of cosmic evil think of the beast rising out of the sea in chapter 13 it represents the unbelieving rebellious nations who cause tribulation for God's people Isaiah makes reference to the wicked being tossed like the sea the sea is also the place of the dead we saw that last time in chapter 20 verse 13 the sea was the place of the dead the sea was a place of chaos and conflict and especially in the ancient world especially for Israel it was the place where enemies came from the sea was something to be feared but in the new creation there will be no more sea now we're not meant to take this literally as in

I think there will probably be significant bodies of water in the new creation there will still be seas you may recall the vision of God in chapter 4 verse 6 John saw a sea of glass clear as crystal the heavenly vision in Ezekiel 47 talks about waters flowing out of the temple and reviving the dead sea but there will be no more sea in the sense that revelation speaks about the sea in the new creation there will be no sea and that means there will be no longer any threat from Satan no longer will that beast arising from the sea exist there will be no more no longer any threat from rebellious nations nor death ever again in the new world so there is no room for the sea as a place for the dead of the new creation just think on that no sea no threats no wars no rumors of war it's a wonderful thought isn't it there's no more sea there's no more suffering look at verse 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away one preacher put it this way it would be hard to find a sweeter more precious verse in all the bible than verse 4 it is little more than 30 words in english but it's here to heal 10,000 wounds and to provide hope for millions and billions of hearts it is almost impossible for us to grasp the reality that these words describe we cannot even begin to imagine a world death without suffering every one of us has to some degree suffered in this world every one of us has stood or will stand beside the grave of a loved one every one of us has shed tears of grief or if we haven't yet it's only a matter of time see death is the great certainty in this life but death is an intruder death is profoundly unnatural which is why we rail against it that's why it hurts so deeply when somebody we love dies we rage against death and rightly so it is the great enemy but in the new creation hear this death will be no more it shall be no more no more mourning no more crying no more pain it's as if

God is saying to each of us to each of his beloved sons and daughters he looks at us and he says look me in the eye I want you to trust me here in the new creation no one dies no one weeps no one cries no one hurts no one is ever scared just imagine what that will be like would you allow your head and your heart to hope and dream of such a place it is a most glorious future it is the future we were made for do you believe it does this hope of life beyond death does it give you a solid foundation do you share your hope with others do you speak of the resurrected

Lord Jesus that is our hope isn't it that Jesus died and rose defeated death and we can feel hesitant can't we to speak of that in this world our culture has done its best to avoid death hasn't it it's pushed it to the sides Mark Ashton the former vicar of St Andrew's the Great in Cambridge he wrote in the face of his own unavoidable death he said this our age is so devoid of hope in the face of death that the topic has become unmentionable well let not that be true of our church death is horrible it is the enemy but we have a living hope talk of it often speak speak of it to one another there is hope in the face of death no more see no more suffering no more sin verse eight comes as something of a jolt doesn't it we thought we'd left the scene of judgment behind in chapter 20 but it is the great necessary negative which makes so clear the positives of the new creation sin will have no place in this new creation look again at verse eight but as for the cowardly the faithless the detestable as for murderers the sexually immoral sorcerers idolaters all liars their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death now this is not saying anything new about who will be and who won't be in the new creation and who will be in hell there are only two categories of people on earth those who have repented and believed in the

[23 : 11] Lord Jesus in other words justified sinners or those to use the language of verse seven those who have overcome the ones to whom God says I will be your God you will be my son that is one category of people those who have trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins the other group are unrepentant sinners those described here in verse eight these are people who live an unbelieving unrepentant life not the person who sins and repents not the person whose life is born again not the person who cries out to God day after day have mercy on me a sinner it's not those but the verse eight person is one who with increasing hardness of heart embraces all of these things described in verse eight and instead of overcoming the world they are overcome by sin by the flesh by the devil and in the new heavens and the new earth there'll be no place for sin and that is a good thing we may win as we read these words

I certainly do that men and women face a future in the lake of fire ought to terrify us it ought to move us to share the gospel with absolute urgency we call all of us to join Jesus and his mission to seek and save the lost because heaven is real hell is real and the destiny of every single person is one or the other so that there should be no sin in heaven is a deeply sobering but also something to cause us great joy and rejoicing no more sin sin is the root cause of all our ills isn't it in this life sin is the great sickness but it'll have no place in heaven what a thought all the things that so entrap you the thing you've been battling with for year after year will be no more the new creation will be a wonderful place because of what's not there but the best thing about the future is not what won't be there wonderful as the absence of those things will be but the greatest blessing will be what is there or rather who will be there in the new creation will be

God himself God will be there with his people look at verse three behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God that is our great destiny this is the great restoration of all that was lost in the garden of Eden God's people in God's presence and this has been the base note promise all the way through the scriptures not just the blessings that God can give but his very self his presence with his people isn't that what we long at least in the human sense we long to be with the people we love we don't just want the things they give us we want to be with them to be in their presence that's why it's so painful when we're torn apart and we've been torn apart from the presence of

God and we will be there with but it's been that promise all the way through Genesis 17 God says I will give to you and your offspring after you the land of your sojourning all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be their God Exodus 6 I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians Leviticus 26 I will make my dwelling among you Jeremiah 31 this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord I will put my law within them and I will be their God and they shall be my people Ezekiel 37 my dwelling place shall be with them and I will be their God and they shall be my people this is the great heartbeat of the

Bible this is the essence of the gospel and of God's purposes from the very beginning people you and me in fellowship with our creator but all that as we know was fractured in the garden as man threw off God's rule and rejected him and removed themselves from God's presence and that fracturing is the root of all sin and all the suffering we see in our world but it will be undone that was God's great gospel promise from the start and through the Lord Jesus he's done it sins penalty paid forgiveness offered reconciliation possible and one day we'll experience it in all its fullness when Christ returns we will dwell again with God forever and this this is what we've been created for this is your destiny all the deepest longings of our hearts our deepest yearnings which can never find satisfaction in this world will find satisfaction in that world because we will dwell with

[29 : 29] God we will see him face to face that is what we're made for and that is the greatest reality about the new creation that we God's people will be with him dwelling with him that is the greatest thing about the new creation it's not so much what won't be there wonderful as those things will be but what will be and we'll be with God our saviour forever well let's look on 2 verses 9 to 27 and we see here a great picture of a new city and this section consists of an extended description of the new Jerusalem the eternal dwelling place of God and his people several things to draw out about the new Jerusalem first it is beautiful it's going to be beautiful look at how it's described there end of verse 9 come I will show you the bride the wife of the lamb and he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city

Jerusalem now it's a bit of a mixing of metaphor isn't it a bride and a city but the mixing of metaphors is necessary because of what is being described is almost indescribable we can really not take this in this is the bride the people of God the eternal city of God the new Jerusalem but the key thing to see is it's beautiful what we see here being depicted as the church in terms of a city so beautiful it can only be portrayed with jeweled gates and walls and even jeweled foundations it's so big it can only be measured by angels verse 11 having the glory of God its radiance like a most rare jewel like a jasper clear as crystal look on to verse 18 the wall was built of jasper while the city was pure gold like clear glass the foundations of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel just try to begin to imagine that it blows our minds the new creation this new

Jerusalem will be spectacularly beautiful now we've all seen no doubt beautiful sights in this world stunning sunsets beautiful countryside mountains rivers there's great beauty all around us just drive a few hours outside the city of Glasgow and you are in some of the most beautiful scenery in the world but how much more beautiful will it be on that day in a world devoid of sin and suffering and the beauty of this bride this city is further elevated because there is a deliberate comparison being made here to another woman to another city the beauty of this city is held against another one just note the pattern here in chapter 21 look at verse 9 just see this pattern then came one of the seven angels who had seven bowls and the angel said to John come I will show you the bride and then verse 10 he carried me away in the spirit and showed me the holy city so that's the pattern remember that seven angels with seven bowls saying come

I will show you the bride and he carried me away in the spirit now flip back to chapter 17 just want to ponder here for one minute chapter 17 verse 1 and notice the same pattern then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls and he said come come I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute and then he carried me away verse 3 in the spirit and I saw a woman same pattern one of the seven angels with the seven bowls saying come I will show you and he carried me away in the spirit it's an identical pattern we're meant to notice that when there's a total contrast being set before us because in both cases he's being shown two women two cities but very very different the chapter 17 woman is the great prostitute verse 1 and she looks on the surface enticing she's wearing purple and scarlet and jewels but looking a little closer the golden cup in her hand is full of abominations and impurities verse 4 on her forehead was written her name

Babylon you see the earthly city Babylon and all that represents there's no real beauty there there's only deceit and death and so the message here is do not be drawn in by the wrong city there is only one city where you can find the true beauty and it's the city of chapter 21 not 17 real beauty is in Jerusalem not Babylon and that is where your citizenship needs to be because that is where you'll find real beauty set your heart on Jerusalem not Babylon cultivate an eye for what is truly beautiful learn to discern the things in this world that belong to Babylon and which things belong to Jerusalem which things hold real beauty rather than illusionary beauty which just covers death and deceit which books in our world belong in reality to the libraries of

[35 : 37] Babylon which ones belong to the libraries of Jerusalem which films will be shown in the libraries of Babylon which films will be shown in the cinemas of Jerusalem I don't want to push that illustration too far but you get my meaning develop a taste for the truly beautiful do not be too easily satisfied with the paper thin beauty that is often presented to us in this present age seek beauty that points to God seek beauty that will find its fulfillment in the beautiful new Jerusalem that is our destiny that is where we're going so the city is beautiful it's also safe this is one solid city now again the language is symbolic it's not literal but it conveys the concept and as you read that description of the city you see its dimensions and it's just mind blowing the scale of this it had verse 12 a great high wall this is a city of a perfect cube its walls are 144 cubits thick these are massive walls massively thick and they have gates and there's a description of the gates but the gates are never shut did you notice that verse 25 its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there so here's the question why would you build walls like that and leave the gates open well the imagery is trying to tell us two things at the same time you have these massive walls because all is secure and you keep the gates open because there's nothing out there that will ever threaten you there is nothing in this new creation that can possibly disturb the peace of those who dwell in this city it is perfectly safe there are no threats no need to lock the doors at night you can keep the keys in the car's ignition no need for banks no insurance our destiny is perfect safety and security no sleepless nights not that there will be any night anyway but it's beautifully safe isn't that a thought perfect safety third thing we see is it's holy you cannot miss the repetition of number 12 as you read this chapter nine times between verses 11 and 21 we have the number 12 12 gates 12 angels 12 tribes 12 foundations the names of the 12 apostles and so on and this is making the point in a beautiful way that the whole people of God will be present the 12 tribes the 12 apostles the old and new covenant people of God all there the complete people of God all those who have been set apart chosen from before the foundations of the world will be there not one person will be missing and the city measures 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia it's about 1400 miles in each direction it's vast and the dimensions here reflect the dimensions of the inner sanctuary of the temple a perfect cube which was in the Old Testament days the divine presence this is the holy of holies where God dwelt and picturing this whole city as the inner sanctuary underlines the point that God will be truly dwelling with his people the whole city is a dwelling place and the points made explicit there in verse 22 and I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb there is no temple anymore

the whole city is the temple because God dwells there and we all dwell with him no need for a temple the holiest place becomes the entire city and that is the reality forever and ever in this new Jerusalem it's glorious the glory of God radiates and pulsates through every verse verse 11 speaks of the new Jerusalem having the glory of God notice the final paragraph of this chapter verse 23 and the city had no need of the sun or moon to shine in it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb by its light will the nations walk and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it this is our destiny this is where everything leads to this is where all that actually matters will find fulfillment and it's hard isn't it to think on these ultimate realities our heads are often down in the day-to-day details aren't they day-to-day life clouds our vision work responsibilities the weekly shop dealing with sick children or ailing parents fixing the leak in the bathroom all these day-to-day matters compete for our attention don't they but revelation lifts our heads

John reminds us where history is going he reminds us again of the glory of God and in the end that is all that matters nothing else in the end matters than the glory of God and our presence with him forever the day is fast approaching when all the things that have so filled our hearts and minds in this world will be of no consequence just think about the thing that kept you up last night that will be of no consequence on that day our eternal reality will be the results of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ that in the end is all that matters when we see with our own eyes what John saw when we see the new Jerusalem when we see the glory of God on that day his magnificent and radiant glory nothing else will matter and as we glimpse the glory of God here as we glimpse our future as his people our present priorities must be shaped mustn't they the things we give ourselves to now must be transformed by what we read history is going somewhere history is headed to a garden city look on to verses 1 to 5 of chapter 22 then the angel showed me the river of the water of life brightest crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the land through the middle of the streets of the city also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit this is Eden restored more than that this is Eden fulfilled this is better than Eden and by concluding in this way by taking us back to the garden by concluding this way the Bible story reminds us that humanity's original purpose in the first garden was what to go and expand outwards to spread the light of God's presence throughout all the earth that was man's mission and that is what we must give our lives to now that is the destiny of history the reign of God over all the new creation and that is what will be when Christ returns he will be with his people and his people end of verse 5 will reign forever and ever sin and death and suffering will be no more only God dwelling with his people forever in his beautiful garden city so much more to say but two concluding implications number one if you are not sure that your name is in the Lamb's book of life then be sure and you can be sure today all you need to do is repent of your sin believe on the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ who died the death you deserve to die who rose from death to life so that you can have life in him will you put your trust in him today implication two if you are a Christian here then this future this glorious reality that we read about must shape our today given this is the destiny of history ask yourself am I living now in light of that coming reality everything we long for will be fulfilled and profoundly that will shape our present choices so are you preparing yourself for that future are you saying no to the lure of Babylon it will be absolutely worth it saying no to Babylon now will be absolutely worth it you don't need to chase after the things of this world because in light of eternity they're nothing am I helping others get prepared by sharing the life-saving news of the gospel are we as a church demonstrating something of the goodness and beauty and truth of that heavenly city friends what we have as a church family is so precious it's a tiny foretaste of that glorious future do you treasure it do you love the gathering of the church do you long for others to come into our midst and taste and see the

Lord's goodness we would do well to reflect regularly on these latter chapters of revelation yes on the horror of hell but the beauty of heaven this is where we're going and dwelling on these realities will radically shape our perspective and our priorities now we're about to sing these words and I close with them how lovely is that city the home of God's elect how beautiful the country that eager hearts expect Jesus in mercy bring us to that eternal shore where father son and spirit are worshipped evermore friends that's our destiny let me pray father god please help us with our finite minds and imaginations to grasp firmly the realities of these words well press upon us the reality of our future press upon us the magnitude of your glory press upon us the need to shape our present lives by what is coming so please transform our minds and hearts and help us please to live by faith and not by sight we ask it in Jesus name amen amen