

The New Jerusalem of Revelation 21
Leith Valley Presbyterian Church, Sunday 27 January, 2018.
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Readings: Genesis 2:4-9; Revelation 21:1-22:5.

It's quite hard to talk about heaven and eternal life with God. No one has been there and come back! And when we think of heaven, it's easy to fall back on stock images. Is playing a harp essential in heaven do you think or can some of us play a cello? Where does the playing the harp come from anyway?

Probably from here: Rev 5:8 "When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

And perhaps we don't like talking of heaven. Isn't it just "Pie in the sky when you die". This must have been said by a New Zealander – given our national addiction to pies. Or it's the "Opiate of the masses!"

But we should talk of heaven! For as followers of Jesus, this is our destiny, our hope! And talk of heaven doesn't need to make us "so heavenly minded that we're no earthly use"! In fact, I think our vision of heaven should greatly affect how we live now!

Look at how wonderful this place is, according to Revelation 21!!

Rev 21:1-4: ¹Then 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. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will *dwell with them as their God*; they will be his peoples, and *God himself will be with them*; ⁴*he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.*"

So this is our hope!!! Life with God! No tears. Death will be no more! There's plenty of pain around today – it will all be gone!

And John sees this:

Rev 21:22-23 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 is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

The Temple is where God dwelt, where you went especially to meet God. But in the new Jerusalem, God is everywhere. He is the light of heaven~!

And

Rev 22:3-5 ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and *his servants will worship him*; ⁴ *they will see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, *and they will reign forever and ever*.

Note this against the background of Exod 33:20-23 ²⁰ But,” he said to Moses, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³ then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

But note the hope of the Psalmist:

Ps 17:15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

And what Paul says:

1 Cor 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So we will worship God and see his face! Wow.

And did you catch what was said about “the water of life”:

Rev 21:6: Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

And Rev 22:1-2: “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. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

So this city is amazing. It has “the water of life” and “the tree of life”. The water flows from God’s throne and so is eternal – the source of eternal life is in God. Eternal life is a gift from God – coming from God’s throne. And the fruit of the tree of life can be eaten! This is the *drink and the food* of everlasting life, the life of heaven. When Adam and Eve were barred from the Garden of Eden it was so that they *did not* eat from the tree of life and live forever (Gen 3:22). Eternal life in the sinful state of Adam and Eve would have been unbearable. *But now*, having been re-made by Jesus through his death on the cross, eternal life is available and wonderful.

So this is an amazing hope. And its solid, reliable hope. Its not hope that the Black Caps will win 3-2 over India in the ODI’s – they’re currently down 2-0. That’s wishful thinking. Its not hope that the Highlanders will win Super Rugby in 2019 – though they

will! But that's wishful thinking!! The hope of the new Jerusalem is solid and dependable – as solid and dependable as the air we breath – because they are both made by the same God!

Its an amazing hope of no more pain. Of no more death! Of living in the presence of God! And seeing God face to face forever! What a hope!! It should pervade our lives. Not as an excuse for ignoring the world around us. But as a genuine true hope for an everlasting future with God.

But let me explore another feature of Revelation 21.

Often when we think about eternal life, it is seen as a setting right of what went wrong with Adam and Eve. Genesis 2 speak of Adam and Eve in a Garden – the Garden of Eden – Paradise. We might expect heaven to be a new Garden – that the end would be a perfecting of the beginning.

But no – the picture given in Revelation 21 is of a new Jerusalem – a new *city*. We go from a Garden to a City. Its *far more* than “Paradise Restored”.

Now lots of us – me included – would probably like to think of eternal life as a Garden! I'm sure there are other avid gardeners among us. The new Jerusalem does have Garden features – there is the river of the water of life (Rev 22:2) and the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, with its leaves for the healing of the nations.' So this is a wonderful tree!!

But it's much more than a tree and a river. The picture we are given is of a new Jerusalem – a new holy **city**.

We can think of lots and lots of down-sides of a city. Housing problems! Transport. In many parts of the world, poverty and slums. Pollution.

But can you think of the positives of a city. Why might Revelation – given to us by the risen Jesus – speak of the eternal future with God as a city?

So what are the positive aspects of life in a city? Talk with your neighbour. Culture; Community; Creativity.

So what do we learn? And what do we learn for life now?

God loves cities! God loves the human creativity and inventiveness that is behind cities!

Bauckham writes:

“As a city, it fulfils humanity's desire to build out of nature a human place of human culture and community” (Bauckham, p135). The new Jerusalem is given by God – but humanity makes a contribution to it. The city – in the Bible – is seen the pinnacle of human history, and culture and community.

So this is a fundamental affirmation of human culture. But its human culture that is God-focussed, and dedicated to God. Not just any human culture – but God-focussed, Christ-focussed culture.

Note: Rev 21:14 And the wall of *the city* has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

So the apostles are the foundation of the city – the apostles are the key witnesses to Jesus. That their names are on the foundations, means that the city is built on Jesus Christ and witnesses to him. He is the true foundation of the true city.

And Rev 21:23-26 ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

So the city is dedicated to God – and so God’s glory pervades the city – there is no need of sun or moon. It is God-focussed.

But v24 reads: the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And v26: People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

What is our glory and our honour? This is who we are as redeemed in Christ and the things we do! Here we see the validation of human life and human culture – when offered to God.

Our lives, our work, our culture, all that we are, our very selves, is to be offered to God, dedicated to him.

So the New Jerusalem is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. And humanity and all we are – all our inventiveness and creativity – is to be dedicated to God. We can do all these things now!!

Our lives, our communities, our cities here and now, are to be a foretaste of this new Jerusalem. The life of the new Jerusalem is our goal – and forms our Agenda today, as people looking forward to the new Jerusalem. We’re not to be ‘so heavenly minded we’re of no earthly use’. But the new Jerusalem is to guide what we work for – lives dedicated to God, human innovativeness offered to God’s glory. What we do here can be an anticipation of heaven – applying the same principles. We are to build our lives, our communities, our cities on the foundation of Jesus Christ now – and we are to dedicate ourselves and all our labours to God -now.

I find it very easy to be a despiser of much of modern life. To be doom and gloom about “civilisation”. There’s much to be upset about in modern life – poverty, the growing divide between rich and poor, violence, abuse... But actually, God is very positive about the God-dedicated city – we were made to be innovators, to be creative, to build things and develop them. Our creativity is because we are made in God’s image – the ultimate Creator! There is a human contribution to the new Jerusalem. It’s not as if it’s all of God’s making – we are involved! That heaven is “a new city” is the ultimate validation of human culture – when it is focussed on God.

But finally, did you see what we will do in the new Jerusalem. Rev 22:3-4: 'But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the new Jerusalem], and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.'

When we worship God now, it is to be a foretaste of the heavenly city! When we gather together and worship God here, we are practicing for heaven! And we are entering into that worship that will be ours for eternity.

May we build our lives, our communities, our cities, on the foundation of Jesus Christ. May we offer our all – our lives, our creativity, to God. May we *now, today*, join in the worship of God that will be our eternal joy. And may the hope, the certainty, of life with God forever in the new Jerusalem be our hope and our sustenance in the journey.

To the glory of God and the Lamb. Amen.