

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Revelation 21:1 – 5**  
**Theme: “What will heaven be like?”**  
**“Look forward to the wonderful future that God has in store  
for us...”**  
**\* The Big Questions of life” (6)**

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***Introduction:***

This is the last in our series of messages on “The Big Questions of life”. Last week, we looked at our penultimate, *our second last*, question, “What will happen when I die?” ....

Today, we are looking at the question, “What will heaven be like?”

Let’s look at the three fold answer to this question that is given in our Bible reading, *in the vision that the risen, exalted Jesus gives to the apostle John about the future....*

***Part 1: “Then I saw...a new earth” (v. 1)***

Listen to how John describes a vision of the future that he received from the risen, exalted Jesus:

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished (Rev. 21:1).**

When will this happen? When Jesus returns again at the Last Day and takes us, *who are God’s forgiven children*, home to be with him in God’s new Kingdom “forever”. Listen to what Jesus says to his disciples, *his followers*:

“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>**There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so.** <sup>3</sup>**And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am (John 14:1-3).**

Paul echoes this in his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica:

**<sup>15</sup> What we are teaching you now is the Lord's teaching: we who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have died. <sup>16</sup> There will be the shout of command, the archangel's voice, the sound of God's trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first; <sup>17</sup> then we who are living at that time will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15-17).**

But where will Jesus actually take us, when he comes for us at the Last Day, to take us "home"? Well, not to some airy- fairy place in the sky somewhere, but to a "new earth" (v. 1), a renewed earth, "forged and refashioned out of the current one, by the power of the Creator who can make all things new" (John Dickson and Greg Clark, "666 and all that", p. 159).

John Chapman puts it this way. He writes:

**When people talk about life after death, they often speak about 'going to heaven'. This is understandable because the Bible speaks about heaven as God's dwelling place – as in "Our Father in heaven".**

**But when the Bible talks about what God is going to do in the future, and the eternity which people will spend with him, it doesn't talk about disembodied souls floating in heaven but resurrected bodies living in a 'new creation' that God will prepare for his people (John Chapman, *Making the Most of the Rest of your Life*, p.23).**

God's new earth will be "Paradise restored", the Garden of Eden again. This is the concrete hope for the future that flows right through the Old Testament into the New Testament, *from Genesis to Isaiah to the book of Revelation....*

The Old Testament hope was that one day the Garden of Eden would not be barred to us sinful human beings by an angel with a "flaming sword" (Gen. 3:22-24; cf. Dickson, p. 162-165). This hope is envisaged by the prophet Isaiah in his great prophecy, found in chapter sixty five:

**<sup>17</sup>The LORD says, “I am making a new earth and new heavens. The events of the past will be completely forgotten. <sup>18</sup>Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. The new Jerusalem I make will be full of joy, and her people will be happy.**

**<sup>19</sup>I myself will be filled with joy because of Jerusalem and her people. There will be no weeping there, no calling for help....**

**<sup>25</sup>Wolves and lambs will eat together; lions will eat straw, as cattle do, and snakes will no longer be dangerous. On Zion, my sacred hill, there will be nothing harmful or evil” (Isaiah 65:17-25).**

John Dickson and Greg Clark write:

**Isaiah foresees a time when all the ideals of Eden will be restored: when people will live in harmony with each other, when humankind will celebrate its God, when creation will prosper unhindered, and when evil will be completely undone (p. 168).**

And this is the vision of the future for us who are God's forgiven children that Jesus gives to John, and which John relates in our Bible passage, Rev. 21:1-5.

## **Part 2: “We will live with God” (vv. 2-3)**

Or more accurately, “God will live with us”!

Listen to how John continues in his description of the future that Jesus gives to him:

**<sup>2</sup>And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. <sup>3</sup>I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God (Rev. 21:2-3).**

So, then who will be there in God's coming new Kingdom on this renewed earth?

\* Well, firstly God, our dear Father (v. 3).

\* Our Lord Jesus, also, of course (cf. John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:17).

Although he is not mentioned in this part of John's vision, but his

presence is emphasised a bit later in the vision when John writes:  
**The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> and flowing down the middle of the city's street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> Nothing that is under God's curse will be found in the city.**

**The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him.**

*\* And us, who are God's forgiven children through our faith in Jesus as our Saviour.*

What does the voice from the throne of God say:

**“Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God (v. 3).**

And what will 'heaven', *God new Kingdom here on are renewed earth be like?* Will it be boring? Well, there are many, particularly those aren't Christians, who think that heaven will be boring. Mark Twain, the famous writer, for example wrote that he'd choose heaven for the climate, and hell for the company. In other words, he was trying to say that spending eternity with 'religious types' would be less than stimulating.

Well, that's the secular view of "heaven", for many people.... And I guess it's a view that we who are Christians can understand, and even sympathise with to some extent....

One Christian writer says about this view of many people that "heaven" will be boring:

**I can sympathise. I was brought up on those old Hollywood movies where heaven was a place of swirling clouds, marble pillars, choir singing, and God, of course, had a baritone voice with an American accent.**

**In truth, I have this nightmare that I die and go to heaven. I find**

**myself seated at the back of a great throng. Way in the distance, St. Peter somehow turns the page of a gigantic book and then announces: “We shall now sing hymn five trillion and seventy six”... (Cole, p.10,12).**

Well, will “heaven” be like this? Will “heaven’ be boring? No way!! Heaven will be just great to go to!! Because of the great company: our Lord Jesus, God our Father, and our brothers and sisters in God's family. And because of what we will be doing there. It will be place of loving, rejoicing, and worshipping.

Firstly, it will be place of loving. We will have learnt how to love on this earth as we *have followed Jesus*, and in “heaven”, *on God's renewed earth*, we will be empowered to love totally and utterly by *God's Spirit in us (1 Cor. 15: 44; cf. Addenda)*. We will live as God created us to live: loving and caring for those around us.

And the sound of the laughter and happiness will echo across the fields and the valleys and the mountains of the new earth. You know, one of the pictures used most often by Jesus to describe “heaven” is the picture of a banquet or a party. For example, he said:

**People will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:29; cf. 14:15-24; Matt. 26:29; Rev. 19:9).**

That's how Jesus often described heaven: as a great party!! “Heaven will be marked by joy, by friendship, by celebration, by laughter, and by festival” (*J. Young, Our God is still too small, 181; Isa. 25:6-7; 65:18*).

And it will be marked by worship of God and of the Lamb, Jesus! And it won't be boring, not unless you find praising God and Jesus in your prayers boring, or you find singing praises to God and Jesus in your favourite songs boring!

Saying and singing to God and to Jesus, “You're great!” and “Thanks so much for what you've done for us” won't be boring!! (*cf. Rev. 4 & 5; 7:9f*).

### **Part 3: “No more death, grieving, crying”(v.4,5)**

Furthermore, as the voice from the throne of God says in John's vision:

**“He, God, will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared (Rev 21:4-5).**

And John hears the Lord God, “the One who sits on the throne say: **“And now I make all things new!”**

There will be no more death, and no more suffering of any kind, because God's new Kingdom will be the Garden of Eden once again, a renewed place where everyone is living in harmony with God, and the effects of “sin” are no more (cf. Rev. 22:3).

I love the way that John Chapman in his little book entitled *Making the Most of the Rest of your Life* points out that we have already had a foretaste of God's “new creation”, God's coming Kingdom. This happened when Jesus, God's King, lived here on earth. He writes: **“As we watch Jesus throughout his earthly life, we get an inkling of what the new creation (or kingdom) will be like. As we see Jesus reversing the effects of human rebellion in his world, we catch a glimpse of the next world” (p. 29).**

Jesus' miracles point us ahead to what the Kingdom of God will be like in all its fullness.

For example:

- \* **There will be no more evil and sin:** Jesus cast demons out
- \* **No more sickness:** Jesus healed the sick
- \* **Total forgiveness:** Jesus offered forgiveness to those in need
- \* **No more disasters:** Jesus stilled the storm
- \* **No more death:** Jesus raised the dead e.g. Jairus' daughter, the only son of the widow at Nain, the raising of Lazarus

- \* **No more hunger:** Jesus fed the 5,000 etc
- \* **No more insignificant people:** Jesus loved and cared for people, no matter who they were

God new creation will be wonderful!! John Chapman sums it up by saying:

**“It’s a place where Jesus is king, and where under his rule there will be no more tears or sorrow or disease or death; no more hunger or thirst or evil or sin. It’s a world that we could scarcely believe possible if not for Jesus. But Jesus entered our world and showed us the kingdom in advance through his life, teaching, death, and resurrection. Because of him, we can know what the new creation will be like, and we can be confident that it will come”** (p. 42, 43).

God’s Kingdom will be great and glorious beyond our comprehension. A few pictures and illustrations come to my mind as I think about how great it will be in God’s wonderful new Kingdom to come. Probably, still, the one I most love is the story called “The Parable of the Twins” which gives us some understanding of how great and glorious it will be (*See Appendix 2 for others*):

**Once upon a time, twins were conceived in their mother’s womb. Weeks passed and they gradually developed more and more inside their mother. As they grew and explored their environment, they sang to each other in joy: “Isn’t it great to be alive!”**

**As the weeks continued to pass, the twins changed further. “What does all this mean?”, one asked the other. His fellow twin replied, “It means that our life in the womb is coming to an end”. “But I don’t want to leave the womb”, said the first. “I want to stay here forever”.**

**“We’ve got no choice”, said the second, “but maybe there is life after birth”. “How could that be?”, said the first, “we will shed our mother’s cord, and how is life possible without it?” “Besides, there is evidence that there were others in the womb before us, and none of them has ever come back to tell us that there is life after birth. No, this *is* the end!” And so the first twin fell into despair, saying, “If life in the womb ends in death, what’s its purpose? It’s meaningless!” And**

**so the last days in the womb were filled with deep questioning and fear.**

**Finally, though, the moment of birth arrived. When the twins opened their eyes, they cried with joy for what they saw exceeded their wildest dreams** (*Lutherans For Life Quarterly Newsletter*)

What a wonderful future we have to look forward to!! And writer after writer of the books and letters of the New Testament implore us not to throw our glorious, wonderful future away, by falling away from our faith in Jesus as our Saviour (e.g., *Heb. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:58*).

And this is precisely what John, the writer of the last book of the Bible, the book of *Revelation*, is on about. He is writing to fellow Christians who are going through a time of persecution, and he is aiming, by writing down the visions that Jesus has given him, to encourage his fellow Christians to remain firm in their faith in Jesus as their Saviour.

I guess that the apostle John's message to his readers and to us can be summed up in the words of the risen Lord Jesus to the church in Smyrna:

**“Be faithful to me, even if it means death, and I will give you life as your prize of victory”** or more *literally*, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (*Rev. 2:10*).

Let's go on clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, and following in his footsteps, until that day when he comes to take us home to be with him (*raise my fist in the air*).

## **Conclusion:**

Let's finish by letting Robin Mann sing his version of Revelation 21:15, which is entitled "All things new":

- 1. I saw heaven and earth,  
brand new heaven and earth,  
and I heard a voice say to me:  
No more sighing, crying, dying - God himself is here.**
  
- 2. He will wipe away  
every tear away,  
every pain away - all things new.  
No more sighing, crying, dying - God himself is here.**
  
- 3. And he will make his home,  
here with us his home;  
God will make his home with us all.  
No more sighing, crying, dying - God himself is here.**
  
- 4. The old has passed away,  
sadness passed away,  
death has passed away - all things new.**

## **Addenda**

- (1)** In an article in an Eternity Magazine, entitled "*What! No pearly gates?*", Rory Shiner talks about where we go when we die, and what happens to us. He writes about our Spiritual body in the following way:  
**"Spiritual" here is not being using in opposition to "physical". He means "spiritual" as opposed to "natural".**

**Paul's talking about the body's power source, not about its properties. It's like a train powered by steam and a train powered by electricity. A steam train is not made of steam, but run by it. And if a steam train is converted to electricity, what changes is not the constitution of the body, but the source of its energy.... In the same way, our bodies are controlled by a natural power source in this creation, but in the new creation they will be powered by the Spirit of God. We who bear the**

**image of the earthly man now will, at the resurrection, bear the image of the heavenly man then** (*Eternity*, Nov. '15, p. 6).

- (2) In his book, *The Trouble with Paris*, Mark Sayers finishes his book by talking about the joy that he felt and that many Australians felt when Australia finally made Soccer World Cup in 2006. Australia was drawn to play Japan, the Asian champions, in the first match. He describes what happened:

**The game began with the Aussies playing well, but everyone in the room watching the match felt nervous as we wondered if our bad luck would strike again as it so often had on a big occasion. And then it did. The Japanese scored a goal that millions around the world --except the referee – judged a foul. We were shattered.... The Aussies kept pressing forward, trying to score. With world champion Brazil coming up in the next game, being defeated by Japan would mean disaster. Nothing was going right; our shots messed....**

**But then, with seconds to go in the game, the miraculous happened. Substitute Tim Cahill, out of nowhere, smashed home the equalizing goal....**

**As the goal was scored, the room detonated. Bodies flew into the air and inhibitions flew out the door. The roar lasted at least a minute, and two days later my ears were still ringing....**

**Before we had sat down, Australia had scored again. We were now winning. This was unimaginable! We then scored again, and the celebrations continued. I could hear cars honking in the street and other households cheering in the dead of the night.... People were hugging and highfiving people they did not know....**

**Then it dawned on me: *This is what it will be like when God's reality breaks into our world in fullness. This is how this chapter of humanity's history ends.* I wanted to cry. God was speaking to me, telling me that this panorama of unadulterated and complete joy is a glimpse of our future. One day you will wake up, and everything will seem brighter, infinitely better, and the**

**air will be fresher. You will look out your window and the world will be remade. You will run into the street to find that death, disease, injustice, and pain are gone, and you will embrace friends and strangers, barely able to contain your delight. Then you will realize that God is walking among us, that he is totally reconnected to his people. This is our future** (Mark Sayers, *The Trouble with Paris*, 207-208).

- \* The ending of the movie *City of Ember* is a wonderful reminder of the future that awaits us.

The young people, Lina and Doon, together with Loona's young sister, make it to the outside after living their whole life in the underground City of Ember. Initially all seems the same: everything is dark and seemingly dreary still, *because it is nighttime*. But then the sun rises above the horizon as day dawns, and the beauty and the wonder of the outside world reveals itself....

- \* And I really like the conclusion of the movie *As it is in Heaven*. Daniel Dareus is a famous conductor who retires to his childhood town, after having a heart attack. He starts up a church choir made up of ordinary people, handicapped people, abused people, and so on. Eventually, the choir goes to Milan for a choir competition. In the final scenes, Daniel goes for a ride on his bike in Milan, then forgets the time, falls, and apparently has another heart attack. The choir has to start without Daniel leading.

A handicapped young man starts the choir singing, *singing his own unique sound*. The whole choir joins in singing musical notes that are unique to each to each one of them....

And then, before long, the whole auditorium is joining in.... It is a picture of heaven, where people from every race, tribe, nation, and language will gather together and praise God (Rev. 7:9-17).