

Revelation 21

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[0:00] Do we have a seat? It's nice to be back. Nice to see some familiar faces. Nice to see a lot of new faces too. It's always encouraging to see more and more folk you don't know in a church.

If you have a Bible, do just turn to 1 Peter 1, that passage we read a few moments ago. We're not going to spend most of the morning here, but I just want to start us off in that passage.

I don't usually preach from a laptop, but I wasn't very organized to get it printed off. That's a first, isn't it? Nor did I iron my shirt.

I think my trousers have collected most of the dust in Daphne's house, which is quite a lot. If you were hoping for perfection, your hopes have probably been let down.

But there is a hope that we have that we can look forward to, which will most certainly not let us down. It was a very applicable question in this shorter catechism that you were looking at today.

[1:06] Unlike many of Paul's letters written to certain groups of people in certain situations, Peter is writing to Christians far and wide. I can't turn the page in this Bible.

His audience is varied, but in this epistle, certainly the first chapter, there is one thing he is hammering home.

Look down there at verse 3 with me. Peter writes, Verse 6, Verse 6, Again down there in verse 8, Verse 13, Verse 20 and 21, Christ was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

I don't know you all that well. I don't want to be overly presumptive, but I think it is generally true that we as Christians dwell much more on our faith than we do on our hope.

That is no bad thing to dwell on our faith, but we often deal with it in the here and now. Rarely do we lift up our heads and look forward to the hope that awaits us.

[3:14] Listen to what Calvin says on faith and hope. He writes, Faith believes God to be true.

Hope awaits the time when his truth shall be manifested. Hope strengthens faith. Hope refreshes faith.

Faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, but hope nourishes and sustains faith.

We dwell often on what we have been saved from, and that is good and right. It's exactly what we're going to be doing this evening. But I want this morning to look with you all at what it is that we have been saved to.

What does the Christian's hope look like? What is this imperishable inheritance that Peter speaks of in his epistle?

[4:34] Quite simply, I want us to consider this evening, this evening, this morning, what will heaven be like? In order to encourage us, right?

To lift up our heads. To stop staring down at our own two feet and worrying about our current situation. Stop getting bogged down in the here and now.

And reducing this world to what we see with our own two eyes. But to look forward with eager expectation. At what is to come.

And to live in light of that. And it's worth getting this right. It's worth spending time thinking about this. Because heaven isn't some abstract reality that should mystify and confuse us.

As Peter says, right at the beginning of this epistle, heaven, for those of us in Christ, is home. This is where we belong.

[5:40] Paul in Colossians tells us similarly, have our minds set on the things above. And so it is good to meditate on what our true home will be like.

So that we can be looking to that certain hope. As we dwell in the meantime in this fallen world. So with that in mind, I want us to turn to Revelation 21.

That is the passage we are going to be looking at this morning. That hope that Peter speaks of.

That he encourages us to rejoice in.

That imperishable inheritance. That is something that John saw something of in the book of Revelation. A glimmer of what is to come.

A foretaste of what it is that we have been saved to. So we're just going to read this whole chapter together. And let us rejoice as we do so. John writes, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[6:49] For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, 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. 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.

For the former things have passed away. And he was seated on the throne and said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also 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 water, of life without payment. To the one who conquers will have his heritage.

[7:53] 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 liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

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 three gates, 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 walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width.

[9:12] And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its walls, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear 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 chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, 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, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God and 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. 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.

[10:34] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations, but nothing unclean will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those whose names are written in the book of life.

Amen. Just a couple of things before we get sort of stuck into this passage, right? This is very much going to be a general overview.

There is some amazing, great detail in this passage that it would be well worth spending time unpacking and understanding, but that's not our aim this morning. We don't want to get lost in the trees because we really do want to see the whole thing.

There's going to be little in the way of profound insights. I just want to show us something of what we can look forward to. The other thing I want to say is don't be afraid to picture things in your head. It's pictorial language for a reason. Don't think that just because we don't know exactly what heaven's going to be like, you're not allowed to imagine it in heavy way.

[11:50] There's a reason this chapter is full of imagery. Full to the brim of words and phrases that invigorate our imaginations, that fill our minds with pictures.

So go ahead and imagine what kind of painting this is trying to portray. Just remember to not hold on to that image too tightly.

Because if there's one thing I can guarantee you, it's the real thing is going to be unimaginably better than the very, very best that our imaginations can conjure up.

So what is heaven going to be like? Well, it's not, I think, what people often think it is.

And there's two main areas people fall into which are really just two sides of the same coin. We think heaven is really similar to this life just without some of the nuisances.

[12:54] Right? It's like it's going to be the exact same except you'll never have to wake up in the middle of the night needing to pee. But when we do that, right, we make heaven so much less than it will be.

Just a slightly better version of the world as we know it. On the other hand, and probably far more commonly, we think of heaven as wholly unlike anything we've ever seen or known. A totally separate existence.

Entirely unrelated. It's relatable to anything we can think of. Maybe we just think of heaven as some space up in the clouds where you play harps all day long. Or just this massive church service where you've got thousands and thousands of people standing shoulder to shoulder singing Kumbaya for all eternity.

Sounds quite boring, doesn't it? We need to avoid either of these extremes, right, because they both detract from the wonder, the reality and the significance of what heaven is to us as believers today.

Because neither of them are anything like what is described to us in Revelation 21. Heaven is real life, but on the most epic and glorious scale.

[14:13] And we see that when we just let our vision of it be guided by God's word. So I just want to pick out five things this morning.

It's fairly basic that we can be sure heaven is going to be like from this passage. We're taking the big picture here, right? We're going to skip over lots of details. We're not going to have time to dwell on them.

By all means, go and look at them afterwards. But I just want to put together a framework for us this morning. It's five things. Number one, it's going to be new. Right?

That's pretty obvious from verse one. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. It's a new heaven and a new earth. Right? I've been saying heaven from the beginning just because that's what we sort of think of it colloquially.

But the future inheritance that awaits us isn't somewhere up there in the clouds. It is a whole new creation. It is a new creation. Verse two, it's a new Jerusalem.

[15:14] This is God's city. Verse five, and within that new creation, he who's seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new. Ever since the fall, right?

Since Adam let Eve eat the fruit and ate the fruit himself, everything has been decaying. Things have literally been falling to pieces. The Bible speaks of creation groaning because of the sin in this

world.

A lot of the time we can see that around us pretty clearly, right? Just switch on the news. Sometimes we see that pretty clearly in ourselves. From the moment that sin entered the world, the things that God made good have been wasting away.

But a new creation is coming. It won't just stop the rot. It's not like you're just not going to get any more fragile. You're not going to lose any more teeth.

Your hair will stop falling out. It'll be nice. You're going to be made new. The world is going to be made new. God is saying loud and clear to John, everything about this place is brand new.

[16:38] So not only is there going to be no more decay, but the things that have decayed will be renewed, restored to how they should have been in the first place. All the marks of the fall, all the stains of sin are removed.

I know, again, that's very different to just being made young again. We often think that age is the problem. It's because we get old that we start breaking and become fragile.

But age isn't the problem, sin is the problem. But everything will be new and will exist in a place where there is no sin.

And there is no Satan, and so there is no possible way for it to be ruined again. Nothing again will ever decay. That's the first thing about our inheritance, right?

It is a whole new creation. Number two, none of the pain and misery of this life will be there. Let's look at verse four.

[17:46] 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.

Think of all the pains and struggles of this life. None of it. you kind of want to just say it'll be perfect and it will, but I think part of the reason God doesn't say that is because we just can't get our heads around how amazing that will be.

Instead of filling up this chapter with all the amazing things that you wouldn't understand, he just says, you know all those things you struggle with? All the stuff that sucks about life right now.

None of that is going to be there. all the suffering that we've gone through, all the sorrow and the heartbreak. No more death.

No more funerals. No more losing loved ones. No more crying. No more worrying. No stress.

[19:06] No anxiety. No depression. No more broken relationships. No more getting let down. No more people giving up on you.

No more pain. No illness. No disease. No cancer. None of it.

not a single drop of it for the rest of eternity. All of those things which bring suffering into our lives will be no more.

And at the start of verse 4 there, we see that it's God himself who sees to it. God himself wipes away the tear. He doesn't just drop us into this flawless new creation and let us go free.

he is there with us, caring for us, making sure that all these things have passed away for good. Number three, it will be beautiful.

[20:14] Let's look at verse 9. Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and he 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 Spirit, 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.

Verse 18, the wall was built of jasper while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

I'm not going to read them again because I struggled with it. The twelve gates, verse 21, were twelve pearls. Each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

It was important to remember, right, this is all a vision that John is seeing. We don't know it's going to be exactly like this. It might be, it might not.

[21:26] But the point here is pretty clear, right? All the things we think are most beautiful, all the most precious gems and jewels, crystal

and gold, all that people back then would have considered most valuable, most precious.

The place is filled with them. It's literally made out of them. The point being nothing will ever surpass the beauty of the new creation.

You imagine the most beautiful thing you've seen in all the world. If you've been to Scotland, you'll know it's there. It'll probably be better than Scotland.

Sometimes maybe we think of heaven as just this, this big old plain where everyone's huddled together, staring at a throne in the middle. But there will be all sorts of beauty.

It's a better Eden. Right? Go back to Genesis and look at all the amazing things that God filled Eden with. And Eden was very good.

[22:40] But this will be even better. All the intricacies and marvels of this creation will still be there. But they will be greater. And they will be untarnished by sin.

The new creation will be beautiful. Number four, it'll be huge. Right? It's another thing I don't think jumps out to us immediately when we start thinking of heaven.

You get that in part right from the fact that it is a whole new creation. It suggests it's going to be fairly large. But then helpfully in verse 15, some guy comes out with a measuring tape made of gold, obviously.

And when he measures it, well, first of all, it's a cube. Right? Which might seem a bit weird, but we'll come back to that in a minute. But when he starts measuring it, he finds out that it's 12,000 stadia wide.

12,000 stadia high. You might have a little footnote in your Bible that says that's about 1,380 miles.

[23:43] Just to put that into context, that's further away than St. Petersburg in Russia. That's the size of the place in John's vision.

And you need to remember, right, this was a vision being shown people 2,000 years ago who didn't have Google Maps. You couldn't swipe across the globe in a few seconds. They would have known their surrounding area well, but maybe distances 50, 100 miles.

That might have meant something to them. But then John comes along and says, heaven's 1,000 miles wide. It's 1,000 miles high.

It's 1,000 miles long. The whole point is this is incomprehensibly big. It's like someone coming up today and saying that something's a bajillion miles away.

You have no idea what they mean, but you know it's a long way. Heaven will be enormous. Finally, number five. We've flown through those four points fairly quickly because this is the one where we want to spend some time.

[24:51] Verse 22. I saw no temple in the city. There will be no temple. You might be thinking, what's the big deal?

Right? We can read it and quite easily think, the other stuff, that all sounds great. It doesn't really matter whether or not there's a temple. But as you look there, you see that the reason there is no temple is because God is the temple.

which is a massive difference from what we find in the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. One of the Old Testament prophets. You don't have to turn there now.

But in Ezekiel, at the end of Ezekiel, we have this other sort of major heavenly vision that we get in the Bible. And Ezekiel has this, there's a lot of similarities in the visions. But in Ezekiel's vision, which is eight chapters long, seven of those chapters are all about the details of the temple.

And then John, in this sort of parallel vision, just goes, there's no temple. Why the big change? Well, we need to understand, the temple, right, had two main points for God's people.

[26:03] It was where God dwelt among his people, and it was where God's people could come to him through sacrifices, through making themselves holy.

And the bit where God's presence was in this temple, that first major purpose of the temple, for him to dwell amongst his people, was at the very middle of, at the very heart of the temple, this little cube called the Holy of Holies.

And once a year, once a year, one guy in the whole world could go into this cube where God's presence was. And to do so, he had to make all kinds of sacrifices, go through purification, purification rites, so that just a moment each year, this one guy could enter into God's presence.

And this was the kind of temple that Ezekiel saw in his vision, surrounded by priests, where there's different sections, some bits holier than others. The point is that while God wanted to be with his people, for the safety of everyone, there had to be separation.

God was there in their midst, but he was still separated. Because there was a problem of holiness. There was a problem of our sinfulness.

[27:33] The story of God's dwelling with man is a major theme. You can trace it through the whole Bible. But in all of it, the fullness of God's glory is never, not once, on display to God's people.

They always, always have to be kept separate. And we can see, we can see the reason for that in Exodus 33. Let me just read you the end of that chapter now. Where Moses said to God, please, show me your glory.

And God said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

But, he said, you cannot see my face, for men shall not see me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and when my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover it with my hand until I pass by.

Then I'll take my hand away, and you'll see my back, but my face shall not be seen. It's not because God reduces our glory or makes himself less glorious, but throughout history, by the tabernacle or the temple, or Jesus himself or the spirit dwelling within us today, God is shielding us from the fullness of his glory, like he was with Moses there.

[29:04] God is shielding us from his glory because in this state, we simply cannot stand it. God's holiness and righteousness and glory and power are so overwhelming, no man can see it and live.

We see even the angels have to shield their eyes from the glory of God. It's like when you stare at the sun, and your eyes go a bit funny.

that this big, but don't stare at the sun, this big burning ball of gas, right, is so bright and so powerful that 100 million miles away, you can't look straight at it.

You can barely look at it at all. Look at all the stars in the sky and think, what is the sun in this universe? Look at this vast creation.

And yet, God is infinitely bigger than all of them. Think of all that means for God's glory.

[30:12] You can't look at the sun. The sun is but a speck to God. Our eyes simply cannot behold him. Our bodies cannot behold him.

No man can see God and live. But then in Revelation, there's no temple. Not because man has made himself holy, but because God has made himself man.

The big difference is, of course, Jesus. There's no temple because at the resurrection on the last day, there will be no need for a temple. There will be no need to separate God from his people.

There's no need for more sacrifices or for special priests to go in and out before God like we see in Ezekiel. What he was seeing was a heaven before Christ had come.

But there still had to be separation between God and man. But that has changed. because of what he has done for us, we, people like you and me, can look forward to being in the very presence of God.

[31:39] I don't know how. But we have in Revelation, instead of this continuing division, there will be no more division.

For everyone, at one point, had to be kept out of God's presence, we will be invited in. All because of Christ. The whole of this new creation is one massive cube.

It is all the holy of holies. The whole of creation is filled with God's presence.

He is its light. 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 lamp.

I don't know if heaven is going to be literally a cube, but this all points to this amazing reality of the most perfect, holy, glorious God that no man can see and live bringing his children into his presence.

[33:02] Let's look back to verse 3 of Revelation 21. 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 and God himself will be with them as their God. All of a sudden, only one guy could go once a year under the strictest of conditions. only to the footstool of God, the whole of God's people are living in for eternity. I don't know how, I'm not going to hazard a guess, but the fullness of God's glory will be with us forever and ever. We will be there sharing with him this new, massive, beautiful creation with none of the pains of this world. enjoying it for all eternity to come in the presence of our great God.

Just as we finish up, the thought of this new creation should excite us. We should long for it.

[34:25] It is something we should always be looking forward to. when we struggle with the sin and misery, the pain, and sometimes what feels like hopelessness of this world, lift up your eyes.

Look to what is to come. This is the hope that we have. And that should spill out to those around us. An eternity. this massive, beautiful new creation where there will be no evil. And God, the very God who made it all will be there with us and we can worship him perfectly in all that we ever do.

That is the hope that Peter speaks of. The certain hope that we have because of the amazing work of Jesus. We, through no merit of our own, get to enjoy the most unimaginably amazing existence to the end of time and beyond.

So long, right, verse 27, as our names are in the Lamb's book of life. So long as we live this life committed to Christ come, we know for certain that this is the future that awaits us.

[35:53] I know I'm probably not alone in having a million other questions of what this new creation will be like or maybe what we hope it won't be like. But the one thing we can say with total confidence as you read through Revelation 21, whatever you're imagining in your head, whatever you can picture, the one thing we can absolutely guarantee is that it's going to be immeasurably better than that.

a perfect place where we dwell in perfect harmony with our perfect God forever and ever. That's the life that awaits us when we get home.

That is our hope that we rejoice in. Let's pray together. Amen.