

# Mem. Sermon Betty Simpson

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] I never knew the tennis player Betty. I knew Betty in the closing years of her life with Ron as they came to our church.

! If I sum up one of Betty's great qualities it would be determination. She was astonishingly determined.

! There are certain people in church life you get home on a Sunday evening and somebody says were they there or weren't they there? And then you spend the rest of the week trying to remember whether this person was there or not and you ask different people and say I can't remember. You never said that about Ron and Betty. Mainly because they arrived about 10 minutes into the service with clattering and bangs and falls very often. But never have I been so glad that people came late to church. And I want to say to Ron we as a church family we have so enjoyed getting to know you and Betty.

It was a joy for us to see her determination and her endurance and her perseverance. And we as a church are very very grateful for her and for you. I'm going to speak from the reading that you just had so if you keep that open before you. One of the distinctives of the Christian faith is the Christian faith is about hope.

[ 1 : 31 ] It is about the future. It's about now yes. But it's about hope. D.L. Moody was a very famous American preacher. Very colorful. And he said one day you will read in your newspaper that D.L. Moody has died.

He said don't believe a word of it. I am more alive than I've ever been. And we believe as the Christian church in the resurrection of the dead. We believe that Christ will come again. We believe that there will be a new heavens and a new earth. And it will be physical. And you might think you are really living now. But for those who have trusted in Christ, God's word says you wait. You wait as to what you will be. When your soul and your body shall be perfect.

C.S. Lewis in those great series of books, the Chronicles of Narnia finishes the seven books with a chapter called Farewell to Shadowland. And this is from the last paragraph. He says, For this is the end of all the stories. And we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover of the title page. 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. A world of peace inhabited by a people at rest, ruled by the righteous king. And that's what you just have read to you.

It's an accurate summary of the last two chapters of the Bible. And I want to ask three questions about this world which is to come. I want to ask firstly, whose new world is it? Whose new world is it?

What Mark just read, a world where there's no tears, there's no death, there's no mourning, there's no crying, there's no pain. How does that world come about? You know if you've been alive, well, you've been alive as long as you have. You know that humanity can't do that. A golden age of humanity. People have been saying that for centuries, haven't they?

[ 4 : 23 ] They think that we can create one. Maybe you think that. Maybe you think that in your life, if I just get this, if I get in that relationship, if this happens, it'll be a perfect world. But you can never, none of us can ever create a world like we've just read, can't we? Today is a great reminder of that, isn't it? Funerals are times when we are faced with the reality that we can't make a golden life for ourselves. But I want you to see in the fifth line of the reading, can you see whose world this is? It says, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. Look at the second paragraph.

Who is saying that? Behold, I am making all things new. You see, you can't make a perfect world for yourself, another guy. You can't insulate yourself from pain and suffering. But God says, doesn't he, behold, I am making all things new. We are speaking about God's new creation. And only God can restore men and women in the universe in which we live. Only God can make a new creation. All things have passed away. And all things become new. Betty experienced that in her life, didn't she? When she became a Christian.

When God worked in her life and she moved from old creation to new creation. And when somebody is born again and brought into a saving life, a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, that is a work of new creation.

And God is making all things new. And what you have at the end of the Bible is a picture that God is going to do that on a universe scale. And it's overwhelming. And that is what God offers you today. He offers you a world that you want. He offers you a world that you need. He offers for you to be born again. To be made new creations. So that you can one day enter his new world. What's going to happen in the new world?

[ 6 : 50 ] Well it tells us that it will happen and things won't happen and it will happen in an instant. It says, doesn't it? Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

And the only way you can describe it, I don't know whether you picked it up, the only way you can describe it in these verses is in the negative. Do you notice what? No more tears. No more death. No more sorrow. No more crying. No more pain. No more sin. No more temple. No more curse. And he describes it.

I've not got time to go and pick up all the details. But he's describing the new heavens and the new earth largely in negative terms. That really shouldn't surprise us.

He's not being negative about what this new world will be like that God will create. Far from it. It's quite the opposite in fact. But how do you describe something that is wonderful beyond description?

[ 7 : 52 ] It's like a young man falls in love. He goes home to his mum and he says, I've met this girl and I've fallen in love. And his mum says, well, what's she like?

And he says, well, he doesn't provide, does he, a clinical summary. He doesn't say, well, she's actually five at eight. She's size 12. She's got a large unusual nose. She's got brown eyes.

He doesn't say like that, does he? He doesn't give her distinguishing features. What does he say?

What does the young man say? He was fallen in love and his mum asked what she like.

He says, I've never met anyone like her before. She's not like anyone I've ever known. It doesn't help the police, does it, if they've got to go and find her.

It's not the kind of description that's going to help the police search. But it does express, does it, how he feels about her. And he can only describe her in negatives. Because in his eyes, she is wonderful beyond description.

[ 8 : 55 ] And that's what John does here in this passage that was read to us. He talks about the new heavens and the new earth. Imagine a world, he says, where there's no domestics. Where there's no arguments.

Where there's no natural or international spike. Where there's no racial prejudice. There's no threat of war. No threat of terrorism. There's no poverty. There's no disease. Imagine a world where there's no Parkinson's.

Imagine a world where there's no drought or devastation. A world where there's no tsunamis.

There's no family breakup. There's no hurricanes. No typhoons. A world without pollution.

A world where there's no sickness. No sorrow. And no death. A world where everyone's got more than enough to eat and drink.

A world where we're not hurt. And where we don't hurt other people. A world where we can reach our full potential as human beings.

[ 9 : 55 ] A world where you never grow old. A world where you're not frail. A world where you're not senile.

A world where you don't lose your memories. Somebody's described it like this. This is what it's going to be like in the new heavens and the new earth. It's going to be brilliant minds in perfect bodies in a transformed universe.

Brilliant minds in perfect bodies in a transformed universe. And that is what the Christian has to look forward to. That is the place where Jesus has gone to prepare for us.

And John describes it, doesn't he, largely in negative terms. This is the world, not the world as we know it.

But the world that it's meant to be. It's the world we long to see. It's the world to come. Look at the pictures. There's some great pictures, isn't it? There's a garden.

[ 11 : 00 ] There's a bride. There's beauty there, isn't there? There's a community. But here's the most important thing that's right in the middle.

Don't miss this. What is it that's so special about this new creation? It's the place. Can you see it? It's in the fifth line. The dwelling place of God is with man.

With men and women. God will be there. There'll never be a place where God is not. Jesus will be there and you will know him.

What a glorious thing that is. Just notice for a moment something that's really helped me that I didn't mention earlier. There's a puzzling phrase, isn't it? It says there'll be no sea.

There will be no sea. What the earth does that mean? Does that mean that there'll be no sea at all? Well, no, I don't think it is. I think it's symbolic.

[ 12 : 02 ] Remember where the Apostle John, he's writing this. He's writing this from the island of Patmos, isn't he? He's in exile. He's separated from the people. And as he looks out into the sea, it separates him. Isn't that so helpful for us today?

That there is a day coming when there will be no separation. There is a day coming when there will be no isolation. There is a day coming when there will be no loneliness.

When there will be no grief. And so the third question is this. Who's going to be there? Who is going to be there? Can you see at the end, it tells us, doesn't it?

It says the one who conquers. By the way of putting it, it says the one who's overcome. So that means there are those who've overcome and there are those who have not overcome.

Does that mean, is it, that he's so determined, like I began with, that she has kind of, by her own determination, kind of stormed the gates to the new creation? Of course not.

[ 13 : 08 ] It's not. Can you see it? Apart from the third line up, can you see it says, it's those who are thirsty. It's those who feel their need. It's those who find their thirst quenched by Jesus Christ.

And by his grace. It's those who throw themselves upon the mercy of God and realise they haven't got everything together. And they walk in the strength of him who saves them.

And though they struggle like Betty struggles, and though they fall like Betty fell, they overcome, not because they are strong, but because of their faith in Jesus Christ alone.

They love the Lord and they want to obey him. And they shall inherit this new world by God's grace alone. But not everyone will.

Those who have trusted, those who have not trusted in Christ. Those who refuse to believe in him. The chapter goes on to speak of the kind of people that won't be there in the new world.

[ 14 : 24 ] It's an incredible description, but one of the groups of people that won't be there is those who don't believe. And unbelief is a wicked thing.

It keeps you away from Jesus Christ. Unbelief to refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus will destroy you. And you will be overcome by that.

And anyone who hears the gospel, the good news of God sending his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to take the punishment for your sin and that he is raised from the dead and he will bring in a new world.

Anybody who doesn't hear the gospel and does not bow their knee to King Jesus. Well, there's nothing worse than that. Can you look at the middle of the middle of the second paragraph?

I want to say to you this isn't sentimentality today. This isn't a dream. And he was seated on the throne and said, behold, I'm making all things new. And also he said, write this down.

[ 15 : 36 ] Write it down. Why is he to write it down? Because these words are trustworthy and true. He said to me, this is done. I'm the Alpha and the Omega.

What does that mean? Jesus is the first and he's the last and he's everything in between for us. And so please don't think this is just sentimentality today.

This is trustworthy and true. And so in this new world, will you be there? Will you be there?

Let me read to you an illustration that I read the day before Betty died. It's from a lady called Joni Erickson-Tarda.

Joni is now in her late 80s. If you can get her books through, read it. She was 17 years old in 1967. She was in a diving accident which has left her paralyzed from the neck down.

[ 16 : 41 ] And since that point, Joni has been an incredible witness to God's kindness and grace in her life. And in particular, she's written so powerfully on this great hope of a future world in which there's going to be total redemption which Revelation 21 is about.

And in a book she wrote about heaven, she says, on one occasion I was attending a conference. At the end of the session, the speaker invited the 500 people, if they were able to, to kneel in front of their seats as they closed the session in prayer.

She's paralyzed from the neck down. And Joni Erickson-Tarda watched everyone around her kneel. And as she watched, she couldn't stop her tears. But she wasn't crying out of self-pity.

Here's what she said was going on in her head. Sitting there, I was reminded that in heaven I will be free to jump up, dance, and do aerobics.

And though I'm sure Jesus will be delighted to see me rise on tiptoe, there is something I plan to do that may please him more. If possible, sometime before the party really gets going, sometime before the guests are called to the banquet table of the wedding feast of the Lamb, the first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees and I shall quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus because the day is drawing near when I'll be able to kneel again.

[ 18 : 20 ] It's a beautiful picture of a future reality. A future reality. A world of peace inhabited by a people at rest ruled by the righteous king.

And the question I can bet you want me to ask you is will you be there? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the reminder of the frailty and the fragility of life.

We thank you for Betty and her witness and her testimony to us. We thank you that she loved and believed and followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we ask that every single one of us will bow our knees, will get off the throne of our lives and allow King Jesus to reign. That in our hearts you would do that miracle of a new creation and the hope of a new world, a renovated universe, ruled by a righteous King.

That that would fill our hearts and minds and affections with joy. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.