

Everyday Gospel | 5 - The Wedding We're All Waiting For

Revelation 22:1-8

August 3, 2014

Introduction

- Scriptures such as Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 5, and 1 Thessalonians 4 are cornerstone texts that describe a phenomenon that all believers in Jesus will one day experience - that Christ will one day return and:
 1. Raise "from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died"
 2. He will reunite "these people with their souls;"
 3. He will change "the bodies of all believers who remain alive [at his Second Coming];"
 4. Therefore he will give "all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own."¹
- So our new bodies will be eternal and we will be eternally freed from the presence of sin, sickness, suffering, tragedy, Satanic interference, and death.
- This is a doctrine, but better said, it's a *promise* called glorification.
- There's one particular text, though, that portrays with striking imagery what the resurrection will be like and the promises it holds for Jesus' followers.
- Revelation 21-22 does more than teach on the facts of the resurrection...
 1. It's a promise for loyal followers of Jesus. If you know anything about the Book of the Revelation, you know that in the first several chapters, the Apostle John addresses seven specific churches in an especially pagan, decadent, persecuting society - churches under incredible duress. And seven times, just in chapters 2-3, Jesus calls them to conquer, or to overcome (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The resurrection is the promise that an unimaginably beautiful future awaits those of us who overcome.
 2. But what's unique about Revelation 21-22 is that these chapters help us to feel this promise, imagine this promise, taste it, and thus, long for it.

¹ Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-18). Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (p. 828). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

- So I'm asking you, this morning, to open your heart to this. See this. Join me at Revelation 21:1...

Text: Revelation 21:1-8

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.

- In the previous chapter, everything that's evil about this world has been vanquished once and for all. Very cryptically, Revelation 20:14 puts it this way: "Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire." Hades is used in place of Sheol, the Hebrew designation for the abode of the dead. Even death and it's abode are judged.
- Every painful, deathly thing that makes this earth a painful home will be consumed in fire:

Grief & Bereavement	Egocentric Leadership	Human Trafficking	Sexual Brokenness
Child Abuse	Tragedy & Calamity	Greed & Poverty	Cruelty & Meanness
Spousal Abandonment	Neglect & Betrayal	War & Genocide	Addiction
Adultery	Sickness & Disease	Rejection	Mental Illness
Violence	Malnutrition & Hunger	Sexual Assault	Natural Disasters

- Implication: We mustn't look to this world to drown away our pain. This world and its pleasures do not satisfy or heal us. Indulging in the things of this world gives only short term relief that, longterm, will further enslave us, and, consequently, weaken our resolve and keep us from seeing with clarity the truth of God.
 - Addictions like substance and alcohol abuse are easy to swing at;
 - But what about those of us who bounce around from romance to romance, bed to bed, looking for a person who might have the magic key to our hearts, that person who can resuscitate our floundering souls because of the damage someone else has done to us;
 - Hole ourselves up in isolation, a dark house perhaps, writhing in pain alone;
 - Binging on entertainment and media to keep our minds distracted from our unhappiness;

- Or maybe, like so many people these days, you're just cynical. Relationally, you're on empty. You're sick and tired of mean-spirited, knee-jerk-reactionary, angry people and you've resolved that, at worst, you'll tolerate superficial relationships, and at best, you'll push back from relationships altogether (except for playing cards with the fellas) to avoid the drama;
 - That co-dependent relationship, which the very thought of living without, horrifies you, leading to all sorts of dark manipulation and control tactics, which will eventually drive that person away, leaving you more alone than ever
 - your worst nightmare, because you just can't cope alone;
 - Churchy - live on and speak in religious platitudes, which is just a defense mechanism intended to ward off potentially hurtful people and the fear of being let down again. "All I need is God" isn't a principled creed as much as it's an implicit admission that we're either wounded or self-righteous. Either way, we want nothing to do with intimacy; it's too scary. We have to forfeit control.
- Recall last week's message in which we discussed sanctification. Remember how we talked about how seemingly out of left-field Paul brings up the problem of suffering, not once, but twice in Romans. And in Romans 8, Paul identifies the source of suffering as the creation's "bondage to corruption." Yet the creation will be set free, Paul says, from this bondage "and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).
 - All history has been building up to this triumphant moment. The moment in which all the created order righteously realigns with its Creator and suffering is brought to an end. But until then, we overcome by the power of the Spirit.
 - The **absence of the sea** in the New Creation is no condemnation of water or oceans. 600-years before Christ, the prophet Daniel spoke of grotesque and deformed evil creatures emerging from the sea, each of which represented pagan empires that would torment and dominate humanity. We now know these empires to be that of the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, along with all those empires that came after them. In Revelation, John also has a vision of beasts emerging from the sea, representing anti-Christian empires, nations, and institutions that tempt the

masses to either dismiss God as a farce or seethe in hatred against his righteousness. So the absence of the sea is a euphemism for the absence of all the evil, tormenting, cruel institutions, tragedies, and temptations that exert pressure, in one degree or another, on each of us every day.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

- Keep in mind that the New Jerusalem is the people of God. In verse 9, an angel said to John, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” This isn’t a picture of *where* we will live; it is a picture of *us* in our glorified state! Dennis Johnson, in his wonderful commentary on Revelation, The Triumph Of The Lamb, noted: “The bride-city symbolizes the saints, the church in its [end-time] beauty.”²
- Contemplate with me several of these promises, beginning in 21:9 through 22, in which John was taken in the spirit to the summit of a high mountain and gazed upon the descending New Jerusalem, the bride of Jesus, the people of God, the church:³
 - God’s Radiance as Jasper: Jasper has a natural mustard color; it's not crystal clear:
 - The Spirit is stretching the minds of John’s readers, describing the beauty of the New Creation in a way that is unfathomable to us;
 - Remember, this is not a shiny *place*. This is a glorified *people* - people who are conduits of the glory of God!
 - 12 Gates guarded by 12 angels:
 - This harkens back to the Garden of Eden, which after the fall and expulsion of Adam and Eve, it was guarded by cherubim. Now these angels guard us in our glorified beauty, not because there will be a threat to us. Remember, death and hades are no more. This is a metaphor for us, God's people, dwelling in eternal safety with no threat of suffering ever again.

² Dennis E. Johnson. Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation (Kindle Location 3375). Kindle Edition.

³ Ibid. ff.

- This is why we are described as having tall walls, signifying complete, impenetrable security - we are a strong, secure people!
- Yet, there are a dozen gates into this city, gates facing every direction of the earth. The more gates, the weaker the walls. But these gates likely symbolize welcoming, inclusive hospitality of the church. It symbolizes the presence of all nations - every race - dwelling together as one, glorified people, the fulfillment of the Great Commission.
- Picture of God's Temple: This is all a fulfillment of what my friend, Robbyn Abedi, preached on two weeks ago - that, in essence, the Bible is the story of the presence of God. God making himself known. God dwelling among a people who are utterly unworthy, but a people he made worthy by the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. This is why John says this in verse 3...

3 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.

- This is the consummation of Jesus' words in John 1:14, that he came to tabernacle among us. We've been on our way back to Eden all along. Expelled, but welcomed again because of Jesus' shed blood. Through the tabernacle in the wilderness; into the Promised Land, to the temple. Expelled again because of sin, yet accompanied by God into the desert, into exile. But we returned to the land of promise, built a new temple, yet it didn't approach the glory of the previous one. But the prophets foretold of another temple that would emerge. One that God would build and one that would far exceed the glory of even Solomon's. Hundreds of years pass. And from a tiny village in Galilee, northern Israel, a rabbi emerges, proclaiming that the temple would be done away with, not by the Babylonians, but this time, by God himself. And this temple would be replaced with the presence of Jesus. A presence that will fill every one of his followers and a presence that makes all who follow Jesus a temple together. Revelation 21-22 is us in our glorified form. We are the temple that God always had in mind from before the creation of the heavens and the earth.⁴

⁴ Ephesians 1:4. ESV.

- So John, on the summit of that high mountain, gasps in awe as he takes in the sight of God's glorified people. This must be what Paul meant when, praying for the Ephesians, he said, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”⁵ Note that Paul’s prayer isn’t for *individuals* to experience God’s presence. He says that the rich, inexhaustible presence of God is perceived and comprehended by a community of saints who are rooted in love for one another through Christ. “It takes a community...”
- I don’t know if John gave a resounding “Amen!” after the “loud voice from the throne” said what he did next in verse 4, but I bet he was thinking it - or maybe he simply wept as he felt wrapped in the warmth of hope, because the following words are the words that every heart longs to hear. This is why we turn to addiction, sex, greed, control, and the like. But if we listen here to God’s promise, we can put down our dysfunctional dependence on those things once and for all...

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.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Conclusion: Big Ideas from this series

1. Follow Jesus faithfully. Overcome this world.
2. Do whatever it takes to live out our identity as the community of Jesus-followers we are designed to be.
3. We must see ourselves as agents of the new creation. God is not waiting to *start* dismantling abuse, addiction, trafficking, abandonment, and poverty at some point down the road. He's doing it now through us, his church!

⁵ Ephesians 3:17-19. ESV.