

Sunday, September 4, 2016

Revelation 21:1-6, 10, 22-25

Revelation 22:1-5, 12-13

A New Heaven and a New Earth

As this is Labour Day Sunday this is the last of this series of different stories and topics as selected for the summer by several people. Today's focus is based on a part of the Revelation John of Patmos received of prophecy what is to come in the future. Many people have debated over the imagery, the poetry and the meaning of the visions of John as written in this apocalyptic book and still there is little to no agreement. But what we do know is that the purpose of revelation is written in Rev 1:19 "Write down what you have seen—the heavenly visions on earth; what is now –heaven and earth and what will take place later- a new heaven and a new earth." John obeyed Christ and it is through these words of Revelation that we come to know more about God's plan for the world and specifically what is to come—eventually!

Revelation is a look into the future with more than prophecy. God reveals himself and is in control of history but we must trust in Jesus His Son so that one day when history stops, everyone will need to confess to Christ as Saviour.

John was on a small rocky island called Patmos because he had been banished there due to his testimony and faith. It is there that he experiences visions of the past, the present and the future. But what do these visions mean? Should we be concerned of how these will come about? Or are they merely the ending of a beautiful story which God inspired people to write down through time?

The book of Revelation is not easy to understand because of the detailed visions and images John received, wrote down and shared with the churches at the time of his exile to Patmos. The letters John wrote were very specific about each of the churches and their ministry. But John's visions are not just the words of the letters. For there are other images of creatures which represent different nations, people and situations in time as John envisioned them. But unlike Daniel's visions in the Old Testament which are interpreted, John's visions are not. Biblical scholars have debated endlessly over what these creatures represent in our modern world. They have also discussed the poetry and the action of John as he wrote down what he remembered of the visions and how the future would come about. And as we read in Rev 1:3, "Blessed are those who read and hear the words of this prophecy and keep these things which are written in it, for the time is near." When these visions were received by John he shared them as he could thinking that they would occur right away. He believed that people needed to be ready soon for the judgments, destruction, the time in between and the preparation for the new creation of heaven and earth would occur soon.

John's visions depict the throne of God, with endless praise occurring, and the Lamb of God who is Christ the one who died and is ever worthy of power, riches wisdom strength,

honour and glory and blessing. It is Jesus whom we have met as the baby in the manger, the Christ of the cross and the risen messiah. And he will lead the world as we understand it to a time of peace and wonder and glory. But the intervening period, the beasts John envisions come forward in battles until such time there is nothing.

But what are we to think and do? Everything and nothing if we are truly God's children in faith and love. Jesus already has saved us from death and we will have the wonder of heaven to experience—someday if we believe and live.

There will come a time when all will be destroyed but in our human understanding we don't know how or when. All we know is that at some time there will be an emergence of a new heaven and a new earth- The reality of this will be indescribable splendour and it will be enormous—beyond our comprehension or of our earthly ideas. There is nothing like it on earth- nor anywhere else! This is the new heaven and earth.

But what we might not realize is that in this new heaven and earth will be some distinct items—the river of the water of life and on each river bank will be the tree of life. This is significant for if we look at Genesis 2 within the account of the story of creation we read that God planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and it is there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watered the garden flowing from Eden.

“And God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Gen.2:17) We know what does occur—eventually both Adam and Eve eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they are banished from Eden as sin had now entered the world God had made.

But what tree is mentioned that is still in the Garden? The tree of life.

God likes this tree so much that he has a special place for it at the time when he will create a new heaven and earth. The tree of life will be by a crystal river. While we cannot fully visualize the glory of this new heaven/new earth, we can however find tremendous joy in contemplating some of its blessings. And this is why this section of Revelation is known and received with joy. Because this new heaven and new earth will be where we will be with God- Father, Son and Spirit. This new home will be without things which we do experience now and it will be an adjustment- when there is no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, and no pain. IT is difficult to imagine but it is also very comforting.

And what is amazing is that there will be no sin- everyone will praise God. There will be companionship and no temptations. There will be meaningful work for God and we will serve Him gladly. We will be in a new heaven and a new earth where life is good always.

There is an urgent appeal and warning in Revelation because the coming of Jesus will occur quickly. Therefore the time of salvation is now because we don't know when these things will happen.

Daniel's prophecy which we looked at briefly taken in one hand and John's Revelation in the other have puzzled many people for generations. There are images which are similar of the Promised Messiah whom we know as Jesus, the angels of God which tell us not to be afraid and the images of beasts which are of creatures which seem obscure or of mixing animals as they exist. Yet there is no absolute on what the visions or images mean. All we do know is that people have looked at Daniel and Revelation and noted the following.

One needs to know Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord for themselves if they plan on being with Christ for eternity. And if we do want this—God will reveal himself in all His Glory someday. Even though days are meaningless in God's understanding of time we know that in the future there will come a time that we need to be sure. But why put it off? Why not be Christ's disciple today—and live ready for when he returns or even when we leave this earth in death.

As we have only touched on the essence of Revelation, we need to know that the key teaching is that we need to belong to Jesus through faith now and to serve Him as long as we are able. We need to be ready for when He calls us home so that we can confident that years into the future we will experience this new heaven and new earth. But wouldn't it be amazing to envision that here and now. Wouldn't it be amazing to see what this will be like as the children of God who watch and worship and work always pleasing God? I can only praise God in thanksgiving.

Holy God, we thank you for the vision of John and how you revealed yourself to him and he wrote this down for us. Even though the images are confusing to us and we wonder what each word means we praise you and know that we can trust you to prepare this New World for us. Help us O God to come to Christ and truly know him as our Master and we are his followers. We ask this O God as we praise you and rejoice in our hearts that you are the one who loves us unconditionally and waits for us when our time on earth ends. Continue to reveal yourself to us. Show us who you are and how we might be like you even just a little bit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

SINGING "I See a New Heaven" 713