

Sunday, August 19, 2018

Revelation 21:1-7

Revelation 22:1-5

### John's Revelation= a New Heaven and Earth

As we continue in our "At Your Request" series for the summer our focus today is on the apocalyptic writing of John as found in Revelation 21-22. John experiences many visions and the imagery in Revelation cannot be fully explained in a short time but the passages read are often what people grasp on to through difficult times of grief and when hope seems to be lost.

John was sent to the island of Patmos and it is there that God gives to him a vision unlike anything else. The vision is apocalyptic in nature because it details the authors' visions of the end times. There is also much hope in this book because Jesus is depicted and called "I am the Alpha and Omega", who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' Other visions of John include the images being interpreted to be different churches. But what we are focusing upon today is what is in Revelation 21 and 22- the new heaven and a new earth and the description of what this will be like.

For generations, the hope of the renewal and restitution of all things had been long cherished and continues to be. Earlier prophets had sanctioned the hope: Isaiah had told of new heavens and new earth and even today with the changes occurring on earth—with climate shifts and challenges, there is this hope of something better to come. Christ Himself had spoken of the era which He inaugurated as the regeneration of something new. His followers caught the truth that the outcome of the gospel age would be when the visions of the prophets of generations before would bring hope to the people of God. They came to understand that they would no longer live as they had been and when the time comes the earth would end.

The characteristic word which runs throughout the description is the word "new." All things are to be made new: the heavens and earth are new; the Jerusalem is new. There are two words which are translated new in our English version: one of these (neos) relates to time; the other (kainos) relates to quality. The one would be applied to what had recently come into existence; the other to what showed fresh features. One might buy a new car just made in an assembly plant or to a student who needs a vehicle to get from point a to b, a new car might be 9 years old!

The newness which John envisions is fresh as the old is swept away. But there will be some comfort in knowing that all things will not be strange. There is some correspondency

between the old and the new, when the new things are called new heavens, new earth, new Jerusalem. The description is figurative, but the spirit implies that in the age to come there will be a blending of things loved and familiar with what is fresh and new.

Revelation 21 calls us to imagine a bride being prepared for her husband. We might easily envision this ourselves if we have been married, or even to a wedding lately. You know the moment when the groom sees his bride for the first time and cries. John describes a new heaven and a new earth as a Holy City- a New Jerusalem, which is beyond what exists in our understanding of a city. Jerusalem was the centre of Christians and Jewish people then and the place where everyone passed through to the holy places of worship. Jerusalem was the city in which Jesus died and also the place where the disciples started their work to tell others after his resurrection.

In John's vision, Jerusalem has a complete makeover actually a rebuild because it shines with the glory of God, and its brilliance is that of a very precious jewel—like jasper but clear like crystal. It is a gated city in a huge square with high walls and angel guards at the gates. Three gates faced each direction and the gates had the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Below the high walls were 12 foundations each named for the 12 apostles of Jesus. And these foundations were filled with every precious stone. The 12 gates were each made of a single pearl and the streets were of pure gold. This new city of Jerusalem would come into existence because the old had passed away.

But what is in this city? There is no temple because God is the temple. There is no sun or moon and God's glory is the light. The gates will never shut—as there is no night and therefore nothing to fear. And nothing impure will ever enter. No one who does what is shameful or deceitful will enter either. Only those whose names are written in the book of life will enter.

So far in the new city of Jerusalem in the new heaven/ earth we only know about what we see the city to be like- big, walled and gated. Yet God will be present too! God's voice will be heard and those dwelling with God, those who believe, God himself will be with them and be their God. God will wipe every tear from their eyes- and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. The old order of the old earth has gone. God will make everything new so much so that we will not be able to compare it to what we know as familiar.

This might be difficult to understand for us when we think about the world right now or what our life is all about. We rely so much on the light of the sun and moon to move the earth and how all this affects the tides and the seasons. But this new heaven and earth will not be

anything like what we have on earth. God's glory will be brilliant and there won't be darkness and we will be with him forever.

For some of us John's vision of the new heaven doesn't seem enough but we won't know until we get there, or when in God's time, the old heaven and earth pass away. But what is certain is that John's vision gives us a glimpse of the relationship we who have faith, will have with God—"Now the dwelling of God is with people, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God." God will look after his people because God has created us and wants us with him.

John's vision continues in Rev 22as we go into the walled city and in one place is God's throne and there is a river with clear water flowing down and into the middle of the main street of the new city. On each side of the river is the tree of life- bearing 12 crops of fruit, one each month. The leaves of these trees are to bring healing to the nations. The curse which began in the Beginning as recorded in Genesis 3 will end and paradise will be restored. God's love will restore us to the original intention of God's plan for his creation and we will live eternally with Him.

Many people do not like to read of John's visions and are afraid of what they might mean to them. Yet when we read these passages, the living Christ of end times does not bring fear to the Christian, but hope. And it is this hope that everyone is searching for. Hope that is being taken away by our modern secular society with many people thinking that this world as we see it is all there is. Or that this world is as good as it gets, but is it that good? We know what happens within minutes- volcanoes erupting, floods, forest fires, earthquakes, tornadoes- we know and see what happens because of technology and because of this instant visual confirmation of facts, hope seems to get smaller and smaller in our minds and hearts. There are many people living in a bubble as they think they are the most important. Yet reality calls us to doubt this. But people who believe in God, and in the Promise of hope and everlasting life know differently. They have an advantage and we who have faith we do too! We can determine what our futures may hold because we believe that God will indeed "make all things new," as he proclaims in Revelation. We can stand on the promise of God that one day we will experience God's home, our heavenly home where "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

This is because God loves us and He has loved us from the beginning so much that Jesus came to live to die and rise again. Jesus asks us to remember him and what he did on

the cross and even before. He asks us to remember him at the table—by sharing bread and juice so that one we will be with him sharing in the heavenly banquet with all of God's believers. We will all see that river of life and eat of the fruit of life. But we must believe. We need to have hope and to live for him each day.

As we reflect on these passages in Revelation let us pray for what this new earth and heaven and Jerusalem calls us to do. We are called to have hope in all its fullness. We have faith already. We believe in God but to truly have hope we have strength beyond ourselves, and beyond whatever may come our way. There is nothing to fear if we have hope in God.

Let us remember this as we pray:

Holy and loving God, our hope is in you and we rejoice that you call us to be one with you at this time. Show us your love and enable us to fully trust you with the future—the new earth and heaven and new Jerusalem. For you are looking after us now and we believe in you. Our hope is because of your love for us and the promise you made through your son. If we believe we will not perish but have life eternal. Bless us we pray. Be with us as we share in Christ's table and renew our hope in you. Amen.