

“LOOK! GOD’S DWELLING PLACE....”

Revelation 21:1-22:5

Key Verse: 21:3

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

An angel announced the wedding of the Lamb in 19:7-8, after Babylon’s fall in chapter 18. Before this wedding took place, God destroyed his enemies: the beast, the false prophet, and Satan, completely and eternally (19:11-20:15). Then, there is no more evil; no more lies; no more murder or injustice. Now in chapter 21, the wedding takes place. It is God’s reward for those who kept their faith in Jesus. Not only is there a beautiful wedding, but there is a most wonderful place prepared for them. It is the new heavens and the new earth. When Adam fell, human beings lost paradise. In this cursed world we are frustrated, without any true hope like strangers and aliens. But God, in his great mercy, provided a glorious hope of eternal life with him in a new heaven and a new earth. Our final destiny is particularly important. Suppose our final destiny is the fiery lake of burning sulfur. We would be utterly miserable even if we enjoyed everything we wanted in this life. But our final destiny is the glorious kingdom of heaven. This is our hope. Let us see how God prepared it.

First, new heaven and new earth (21:1-8). This section is closely related to 20:11-15. Together these two sections show the two aspects of God’s judgment. First, is the negative--the punishment of the wicked and all of God’s enemies. Next is the positive--the reward for those whose names are written in the book of life. While 20:11-15 emphasizes punishment with one reward reference, 21:1-8 emphasizes reward with one punishment reference. The purpose of God’s judgment is not just to destroy his enemies. It is to create a new heaven and a new earth for God to live with his people forever.

Verse 1a says, “Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away....” This is a quote from Isaiah’s

vision of a new heaven and a new earth, where joy and gladness will prevail (Isa 65:17-18). The Greek word translated “new” is not “*neo*,” which refers to order of time, but “*kainos*,” which indicates a newness in quality or essence.¹ This would suggest--not the complete destruction of the old and formation of something new out of nothing, but the transformation of the old into something new. Apostle Paul’s teaching about the resurrection of the body helps us to understand this. Our physical bodies are fit to live on earth, but not in the world to come (1Co 15:48-50). We must be transformed with new spiritual bodies--fit for the new heaven and the new earth--while keeping our identity. Likewise, the old heaven and earth will be transformed into the new. Verse 1b says, “...and there was no longer any sea.” This does not mean that there will be no water in the new creation, for the river of the water of life flows down the street of the city (22:1-2). Rather, it means that all evil disappears. In Revelation “the sea” symbolizes the origin of cosmic evil, chaos and idolatry, which emerged as the beast (13:1) and a place of death (20:13). In a word, there will be no evil in the new heaven and new earth. We cannot understand this vision with our common sense; it is something totally new. It will be more amazing and wonderful than we can imagine.

Now God’s vision to John shifts to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. She is described as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. To a bride, her wedding day is the most blessed and happy day. She makes herself as beautiful as possible, not for her vanity, but for her bridegroom. This bride is the church, redeemed people (14:3; 19:7-8), and the bridegroom is the Lamb who was slain. The bride comes down out of heaven from God--graciously, beautifully. This blessed wedding portrays the consummation of an intimate love relationship between God and his people. The greatest blessing of heaven will be unhindered fellowship with God himself as described in verses 3-4. John heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them” (3a). The word “Look!” is an imperative. This calls our attention to see that now, God’s dwelling place is among his people. There is no longer a separation between God and his people. They are brought together in a perfect, eternal union. This is the complete restoration of paradise, fulfilling God’s promise.

¹ Beale, G.K., *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015) p. 464.

Genesis 2 describes the environment of paradise, the garden of Eden. It was perfect--physically, emotionally, and spiritually. There was no pollution, natural disaster, hatred, violence, injustice, poverty, or hunger. It was full of life, joy, love, and peace. It was because God dwelt there. God provided everything they needed, protected them, and had wonderful fellowship with them. However, when Adam disobeyed God, he lost the privilege of dwelling with God in paradise. The power of sin and death entered the world and began to destroy everything. Yet, God did not abandon mankind. God made a way to dwell with us. The word "dwell" means "tent," or "tabernacle," and calls to mind the types of God's dwelling with his people. This comes purely by his grace. After God redeemed his chosen people Israel, he dwelt among them in a tent. Later, his dwelling place was the tabernacle, and then the temple. There, God forgave his people's sins and spoke to them. Nevertheless, their fellowship with God was quite limited because God is holy, and they were sinners. Throughout history, God was so gracious and loving toward them. But they continually rebelled against God and fell into the sin of idol worship. Then the temple was completely destroyed.

Still, God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son (Jn 3:16). Jesus, the eternal Word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14a). Jesus gave people meaning and purpose of life, and hope, by teaching the words of God. With great compassion he took care of many sick people and set the oppressed free. He comforted and restored the broken-hearted. He served all kinds of sinners one by one and finally gave his life as a ransom for us. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and a new and living way was opened to God (Heb 10:19-20). So Jesus became the temple (Jn 2:21). After his ascension, Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to dwell among us. Now we have fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit. As wonderful as this fellowship is, it is a limited experience of what will come. It is limited because we still have a sinful nature and a perishable body. In his glorious kingdom, our sinful nature will be gone, and our bodies will be transformed into glorious, spiritual bodies. We will enjoy the most intimate and unbroken fellowship with God in his kingdom. This fellowship was described by Richard Baxter (1615-1691), a renowned English Puritan church leader: "...we shall have enlightened understanding without the Scripture, and be governed without the written law; for the Lord will perfect his law in our hearts, and we

shall be all perfectly taught of God...to have necessity supplied immediately from God is the case of the saints in heaven. To have no necessity at all, is the prerogative of God himself.”²

Verses 3b-4a says, “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain...” As we remember in chapter 4, God was seated on the throne in awesome majesty and glory. So the four living creatures, as they praised and worshiped God, could not look at him directly. This glorious God now embraces his people with gentleness. Instead of having angels do it, he himself wipes the tears from our eyes. These tears mark the real pain and sorrow we experience living in a fallen world. They are the tears that accompany losing a loved one; they are the tears of enduring a terrible injustice; they are the tears of a heart broken by betrayal; they are the tears of frustration, failure, depression, sorrow, and death. Nothing in this world can stop these tears from flowing. But God himself will comfort us and wipe every tear from our eyes, saying, “Don’t cry. I have carried all your sorrows.” There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. In this world we suffer in many ways, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Who can understand our unbearable pain? Who can relieve our pain? Only God will do this when he dwells among us. In this way he will be our God. He will make an amazing new world where the old order of things has passed away (4b).

In verse 5a, he who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” God himself guarantees the certainty of his new creation. With the same power which he used to create heaven and earth out of nothing, he is now making everything new. It seems too wonderful and amazing to believe. In truth it is beyond our imagination. But God wants us to believe it. So he told John, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (5b). Then God said, “It is done” (6a). These words remind us of Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). While Jesus’ words mark the completion of redemption work, God’s words mark the end of redemptive history: God’s enemies have been destroyed completely and God’s kingdom is fully restored. Then God reminded John of who he is: “I am the Alpha and

² Practical Works of Richard Baxter [reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 7,16.

the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (6b). The LORD stands beyond the universe’s beginning and its end as the Sovereign Creator and Consummator, the First and the Last. From him, through him, and for him are all things (Ro 11:36). As the Eternal God, he can satisfy our thirsty souls by giving water without cost from the spring of the water of life (6c). Nothing else can satisfy us; only God can.

Verses 7-8 reiterate God’s promise of victory and his warning of judgment. In chapters 2-3, God promised the churches that he would bless those who are victorious. The victorious are those who triumphed over Satan, sin and death by trusting in the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (12:11). They did not give in to fear--and compromise with the corrupted world, even in the midst of persecution. God is not ashamed to be called their God but welcomes them into his eternal kingdom as his children. On the other hand, all the wicked will be excluded from the new world: the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. They do not inherit the new heaven and the new earth; only the bride of the Lamb--those purchased by the blood of Christ--will inherit it.

Second, new Jerusalem (21:9-22:5). While the first section emphasizes the intimate relationship between God and his people, this section describes the beautiful dwelling place God has prepared for us. Jesus promised his disciples that he would go and prepare a place for us and that he would come back to take us to be with him in that place (Jn 14:2-3). Let us see how glorious our future home will be. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (9). Then he carried John away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed him the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (10). It is both a place, and God’s people.

Verses 11-21 describe the architecture of the new Jerusalem: its walls, gates, foundations, and measurements. The fundamental characteristic of the city is that it shines with the glory of God (11a). Its brilliance is like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal (11b). God’s splendor fills this

holy city. In ancient times, gates and walls served for protection. Since all evil has been abolished, the city no longer needs protection. Nevertheless, God provides a great, high wall with twelve gates and reveals his wisdom as a builder. The gates bear the names of Israel's twelve tribes, and the Lamb's twelve apostles are named on the walls' foundations; this signifies the unity of Old and New Testament believers (12-14).

Verses 15-17 tell us the dimensions of the city. Just as the Most Holy Place in the Temple was shaped like a cube, the new Jerusalem is a cube which is 1,400 miles wide, long, and high. This city would cover more than half the land surface of the USA, while extending 1,400 miles into the sky. It is big enough for all believers to have their own mansions. We may wonder how we will travel about in the city. Since our resurrection bodies will not be subject to the laws of nature, it is quite possible that we will fly freely, without hindrance. And there will be no accidents, but only perfect harmony. Verses 18-21 describe the materials the city is made of. These include jasper--a diamond like stone, pure gold, as pure as glass, and every kind of precious stone: sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, turquoise, jacinth, and amethyst. The twelve gates are twelve pearls and the street is made of gold. Together, these stones provide a brilliant array of beautiful colors which reflect the glory of God. It is the best place for God's people to dwell in. This demonstrates God's loves for his people.

Inside the city, John did not see a temple. Up to this point, there has been a temple in heaven. The temple is the place of God's presence which shields his people from his holiness. Since evil, sin and death have all been removed and his people are fully transformed, now we can bear his presence and go to him freely. So there is no need for a temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (22). We will be constantly in the Lord's presence. Life will be worship and worship will be life. The present earth depends on the sun and moon to provide cycles of light and darkness. The Holy City does not need sun or moon to shine on it. The glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (23). The redeemed from the nations will enter the Holy City, bringing their glory (24,26). The gates of the city will never be shut, for there will be neither night nor enemy (25). Nothing impure will ever

enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (27).

The final vision of the new Jerusalem in 22:1-5 reflects the full restoration of the garden of Eden; in fact, its quality is superior. There is no longer a possibility for man to sin, for Satan has been removed. We have eternal life and enjoy God forever. The river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1). Ezekiel 47, which we studied last week, portrays the river of the water of life flowing from the temple. Now God and the Lamb are the temple, the center of the new world. It is from God and the Lamb that the river of the water of life flows, symbolizing eternal life. It flows constantly, never stopping, never running dry. Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon searched for the "fountain of youth." He never found it. But here it is in the holy city! Eternal life is abundant and flowing freely down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life. The tree of life bears twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (2). The tree of life was in the middle of the garden of Eden and symbolizes the blessing of eternal life. The fruit of the tree represents the eternal provision of God for his children. The word "month" is more than a measure of time. It expresses joyous provision for all eternity and an endless variety of delicious fruits. The word "healing" does not mean mending what is broken. Rather it means "health giving" or "lifegiving." The fruit of this tree will keep us vibrant, strong, energetic, and youthful. No one will age; we will all be beautiful and handsome forever.

When Adam sinned, the earth was cursed. Guilt, strife, struggle for survival, sickness, sorrow, and death resulted. But in the new world, "No longer will there be any curse" (3a). The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him (3b). At the heart of this blessing is fellowship with God and seeing his face (4). In the past, no one could see the Lord's face and live due to their sins. But now we will see him face to face. 1:16b says that Jesus' "face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." His face is so brilliant that it gives us endless delight. As we delight in him, he also delights in us. Zephaniah 3:12 says, "He will take great delight in you. In his

love he will no longer rebuke you but rejoice over you with singing.” So we never tire of looking at him. We can enjoy him forever. His name will be on our foreheads, sealing us as his treasured possession. There will be no more night (5a). The glorious light of God’s presence will shine on us forever. And in union with Christ the King, we will worship him as priests and reign with him over the new earth for ever and ever (5b).

In the midst of many trials in this world: a viral pandemic, racial tension, riots and political turmoil, the LORD tells us to “Look!” He is coming to dwell with us in a new heaven and new earth forever. This glorious hope gives us comfort and joy in any situation. It helps keep spiritual fervor to serve the LORD. It encourages us to grow in godliness. It purifies us, just as our LORD is pure (1Jn 3:3). Above all, we can live for the glory of God in whatever we do. Thank God for giving us the glorious vision of his kingdom. Let us hold onto this hope and testify about Jesus in this troubled world.