

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

The Life Everlasting

June 6th, 2021

Revelation 21:1-22:5

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Revelation 21:1. We're talking this morning about the life everlasting. This is the LAST LINE in the Apostles' Creed and therefore the last sermon in our series on the Apostles' Creed. As I said to you in the first sermon in this series, quoting Albert Mohler:

“All Christians believe more than is contained in the Apostles' Creed, but none can believe less.”¹

So this is CORE CHRISTIANITY.

Every Christian believes MORE than this – but no true Christian believes LESS than this – and why would you want to? All of these things are not just TRUE – they are GLORIOUSLY TRUE – and I think you will agree, that is particularly true with respect to our topic this morning. Hopefully you have your Bibles open now to Revelation 21 verse 1; we'll be reading all the way through to verse 5 of chapter 22. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), xvi.

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.² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.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.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.”⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.¹⁷ He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement.¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of

God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 21:1–22:5 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

In the Book of Revelation, the curtain is pulled back as it were, and the Apostle John is given GLIMPSES of REALITY. That’s what these chapters are. John was in prison at the time, he was enduring persecution, he was old, his body was failing, his friends were all dying – and so this vision was meant to encourage him. A vision of ULTIMATE REALITY serves to relativize our present experiences. We talked about this last week. Paul said:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

So – what is that? What is the GLORY that is to be revealed to us? John’s vision functions as a sort of “preview”. It doesn’t tell us EVERYTHING we’d like to know but it tells us enough for us to answer a couple of very common questions. The first one is this:

What Will The Life Everlasting Be Like?

There were several interesting features highlighted in John’s preview, the first one he mentions is:

1. The New Heavens and the New Earth

Revelation 21:1

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. (Revelation 21:1 ESV)

Peter used that phrase as well – we're not sure if he had a similar vision or if he just picked this language up from the Old Testament where it occurs as well, but Peter said in 2 Peter 3:13:

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13 ESV)

So there is going to be a NEW COSMOS. Peter talked about some sort of renewing cosmic FIRE in 2 Peter 3:12; he said:

the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (2 Peter 3:12 ESV)

So who knows exactly what that means. Will a star explode? Will God wave his arm and send out a cosmic wave? We don't know, we aren't told – but however it happens, there will be some sort of GRAND COSMIC RENEWAL – like the flood, only with FIRE instead of water and affecting the whole UNIVERSE, not just the earth.

All of creation will be WIPED CLEAN. Every trace of sin and wickedness will be evaporated.

And then a SOURCE of renewal and life will DESCEND!

That's the second feature we want to notice in the vision; John talks about a holy city – the NEW JERUSALEM – descending out of heaven from God.

2. The New Jerusalem

In Revelation 21:2 John says:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2 ESV)

Now interestingly, in the vision the “new Jerusalem” is described in ways that suggest that it isn’t just a city, it is also a people. Look at verse 9. The interpreting angel says to John:

“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:9–10 ESV)

So the “city” is “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb”.

Now, of course that isn’t as confusing to the Bible reader as it might be to someone looking at this for the first time. In John 14 Jesus said to his disciples:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1–3 ESV)

So Jesus told his disciples that he was EXPANDING the Father’s house, as it were, to make space in it for all true believers. So putting that all together, the house is the city is the church.

And in case we didn’t put all that together – the vision does it for us. Look at Revelation 21:12–14; John is describing the city – the new Jerusalem – the Bride. He says:

“It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates **the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel** were inscribed—¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were **the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**” (Revelation 21:12–14 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

That's a pretty obvious way of saying that this HOUSE – which is a CITY – which is THE CHURCH – is made up of ALL TRUE BELIEVERS, Old Testament and New.

The city is their HOME – and they descend from the presence of God to the RECENTLY SCRUBBED AND SCOURED EARTH to bring renewal.

There is a picture of this in the Book of Ezekiel. He talks about a rebuilt HOUSE OF GOD – do you remember that? It was never built – because it couldn't be built – not by human hands anyway – but Ezekiel sees the HOUSE OF GOD and he sees something coming OUT from the house of God from below the threshold. He says:

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). (Ezekiel 47:1 ESV)

The water kept flowing and getting deeper and deeper – and do you remember what it was doing?

He tells us in Ezekiel 47:9:

“wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.” (Ezekiel 47:9 ESV)

Everything will live wherever the river goes. Even the SEA will become freshwater – well that's exactly what the Apostle John said. He said:

the sea was no more. (Revelation 21:1 ESV)

He said:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1–2 ESV)

Are you seeing that? That's the third feature of the vision we need to notice:

3. The River Of Life

Flowing from the CENTRE of the house, which is a city, which is the church, the Bride of the Lamb. Life giving POWER and RENEWAL goes OUT FROM THERE and spreads to the entire CLEANSED and RENEWED COSMOS and wherever that river goes it brings LIFE.

The world comes back to life!

The universe comes back to life!

Nations come back to life!

That's what the picture is saying. There will be people who know the Lord. People who SEE the Lord. People who GO IN and GO OUT – that's what the text says:

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (Revelation 22:4 ESV)

the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (Revelation 21:24 ESV)

There is a CITY that brings LIFE to the universe and at the very CENTRE of that CITY is the PERSON and the PRESENCE of the Lord.

That's the fourth thing – and the most important thing I want you to see here.

4. The Presence Of God

That's the BIG ANNOUNCEMENT, look at Revelation 21 verse 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. (Revelation 21:3 ESV)

We assume the speaker here is one of the Cherubim standing by the throne and in his THUNDEROUS VOICE he says: THIS IS IT!!! This is what history has been waiting for!! This is what the whole creation has been LONGING FOR!! This is GOD DWELLING IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE! The Master has come home and the world can now REJOICE!

This is THE ARC OF HUMAN HISTORY RESTORED!!

This is where the story went sideways back in the beginning – do you remember that?

God had created the cosmos and he had put a garden temple at the very centre of it and in that garden temple he had put a man and a woman whose job was to cultivate the garden and to spread the beauty and the glory of it outwards into all of creation. They didn’t have to do this on their own – they couldn’t have done it on their own – they did it as STEWARDS of the GLORY and the GOODNESS of the Lord. They were “channels only” as we used to sing.

They were go-betweens, they were viceroys – they were GOVERNORS – call them what you like. They met with God and then they ministered to all creation.

But then everything fell apart. Genesis 3:8 says:

“they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” (Genesis 3:8 ESV)

THEY HID FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD!!

Because they had sinned. They had rebelled. They had tried to de-God God! They tried to become gods, deciding right and wrong for themselves – and the universe immediately grew cold. The ARC of human history was disrupted. Everything STOPPED because NOTHING CAN WORK as long as human beings are apart from God!

We are nothing without access to God! We are not THE WELL – we are BUCKETS ONLY! We can draw from the well – and we take to the world – but to do that we must have access to the PRESENCE. And of course that’s the CLIMAX of the story of the fall. After the sin and rebellion of the man and the woman God said:

²²“Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22–24 ESV)

The universe would not do well under the care of immortal men and women in active rebellion against their God – so everything STOPS! The story is put on pause. The universe begins to GROAN and the man and the woman begin to fade and fail. Apart from God – they are nothing!

The story can’t continue until SOMEHOW they find a way to go HOME!

And that’s exactly what the CROSS of Jesus Christ accomplished! It opened a way! Back into the heart of the heavenly temple – back to the source of all life, health and cosmic renewal – that’s what the Gospels writers are communicating when they describe what happened at the moment of Jesus’ death upon the cross. Matthew says:

“behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matthew 27:51 ESV)

The earth itself SHOOK with anticipation because if we have a people again who can go in and go out before the Lord – then we have the makings of a whole new world!

That’s what changes the game – that’s what renews the cosmos: access to the presence of the Lord! And that’s what Jesus PRAYED FOR US TO HAVE in his High Priestly Prayer in John 17. He said:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24 ESV)

I want them to be IN AS DEEP AS I AM – that’s what Jesus said! I want them to SEE MY GLORY – the glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Jesus wants you to know God and to see God like that!

And you will.

You will go in and you will go out. You will be changed and you will bring change to the entire cosmos – thanks be to God!

So that’s what it will be like – and that’s by far the most common question that people ask about this doctrine but there are two other questions that I want to touch upon very briefly. The second question flows pretty naturally out of the first. We want to know what it will be like and then of course we want to know what we will do.

What Will We Do?

Well, based on everything we’ve just talked about, it seems pretty clear that we will be doing at least these three things:

- 1. We will cultivate**
- 2. We will worship**
- 3. We will rule**

I suppose you can put those in any order that you like. As we’ve talked about there is an apparent rhythm here; there is this “going in, going out, going in” movement that characterizes our experience of everlasting life and that brings healing and renewal to the cosmos.

The second half of chapter 21 describes the going out. The river goes out from the temple and brings life and renewal to creation. But then in the very last paragraph of chapter 22 we see the end-product of that:

“the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Revelation 21:24–26 ESV)

So as the world is brought back to life they are MAKING THINGS and they are GIVING things as an act of worship to the Lord.

In essence, they are doing exactly what human beings were created to do in the beginning. God put the man and the woman in the garden of Eden to:

“work it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15 ESV)

God put human beings down in the centre of his creation and he said: “Alright now, boys and girls, this is your world – DO SOMETHING WITH IT”

And that’s exactly what will happen again in the future.

You see, God doesn’t NEED a COSMOS. God is a Spirit and does not have a body like men – that’s from our Children’s Catechism. That’s Christian Theology 101. God is a Spirit – so he does not need a physical universe. We need a physical universe. This is for us! Which is why Jesus became one of us! Because to do our JOB as HUMANS we need GOD WITH US! So with Jesus as our Captain and King we will DO FINALLY what we were created to do in the first place. We will guard, grow, keep and care for the physical universe.

We will WORK IT HERE and WORSHIP WITH IT THERE – that’s what we will be DOING in eternity – thanks be to God!

Which leads me to my last question:

How Do We Get There?

That's an important question – because the vision makes it CLEAR that not everybody DOES get there. Revelation 21:27 says:

“nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Revelation 21:27 ESV)

In case we didn't get the message there is another scene like that later in chapter 22. Verses 14-15 say:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:14–15 ESV)

So there are insiders and outsiders. There are people who become part of that Holy City – the new Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb – and people who are outside, in the dark, away from God – forever.

So – how do we get there?

Verse 14 holds the answer, doesn't it? Look at it again:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (Revelation 22:14 ESV)

So we want to “wash our robes” and we want to “enter by the gates” – what does that mean?

Obviously this is symbolic language – but the symbols have already been explained, so we're good to go here. In Revelation 7 we are told that the people up in heaven right now waiting for all of this to get started down here are those who:

“have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”
(Revelation 7:14 ESV)

So to wash your robes – means to have your sins washed away by the blood of the Lamb. It means to go to Jesus Christ as your priest. It means to kneel at the foot of his cross and say: Have mercy on me a sinner!

Have you done that?

You need to wash your robes in the blood of the Lamb.

And you need to enter through the GATE. We know that one too. In John’s Gospel Jesus said:

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10:9 NIV11)

Alright – so you need to do that. You need to take Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You need to be in relationship with him. If you are IN HIM then you are THROUGH THE DOOR – that’s what the Bible is saying. That’s what Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

It’s so CLEAR for any with eyes to see! Jesus is the GATE, he is the WAY, he is the DOOR - so – COME!

Come to the Father! Come to the City! Come to the River. Come home!

Come!

The Spirit and the Bride says come!

Come unto Jesus and be saved.

Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.