

“Star Wars: The New Heaven”

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June 19, 2011

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to one of the easiest passages in the Bible to find, the last two chapters: Revelation 21 and 22. If you are a first time guest or visitor with us this morning, today we find ourselves at the end of the book of Revelation, but we actually find ourselves in the middle of a series throughout the book of Revelation. If you are a guest or visitor, allow me to explain. Much like the Star Wars saga that George Lucas wrote, the first movie that we knew of in the 1970s was actually the fourth out of six stories. And it is in the final story, story number six which was the third movie, that there is celebration, that there is a rejoicing, that darkness has been defeated, that light has won, that the characters everyone was excited about ended up being victorious and the ones we all wanted to “boo” ended up in demise. And yet, it wasn’t actually the last movie. It was the sixth and final story, but it was the middle movie.

And as we will see next week as we come to Revelation, chapter 1 is one of the things we desire to do in studying the book of Revelation is to have a greater understanding of the concepts such as what is this thing known as the great tribulation, who is this character the antichrist, what is judgment day and this thing known as the millennium and Armageddon. And today we come to that final issue, that final subject matter that is addressed in the book of Revelation: the fact that there is a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. And the reason that I wanted to use this in the middle is that because when we come to the end of Revelation, actually in the middle of the text, I want to have everything fully developed. I want us to know how it is all going to end, to know about all the characters so that next week we can begin focusing on not only some very exciting things at the beginning of the book of Revelation but how do we properly prepare ourselves to respond to the truths that we’ve learned in the book of Revelation.

Before we turn to Revelation, chapters 21 and 22 let me share with you that this is the great culmination. This is everything that we sing about. This is everything that the church of Jesus Christ stands for. If you are a person here today and you have understood that you are a sinner, needing a Savior, have asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and save you then you are what the Bible calls born again. You have thought thoughts, you have dreamed dreams, you have heard sermons, and you've sung songs, but today we actually read what it is that the Lord has prepared for us. This is why there are scriptures saying that no mind has any idea of how great it is going to be. This is why the apostles came to Jesus in John 14 and He made the statement, "2In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." This is everything that the Christian faith is leading us toward. When we put our lives in the hands of Jesus Christ, we will read today a passage of scripture of what we are promised for eternity.

As we turn to the book of Revelation, technically speaking, chapter 21, verse 1 through chapter 22, verse 5 is about the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem. As we will see in just a moment, beginning in verse 6 onward is actually how we are to respond to this information. But for the sake of time, I'm just going to read through the first seven verses.

Revelation 21:1-7. "1And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto

me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

Today when we look at this passage about the New Heaven, the New Earth and the New Jerusalem in simplistic terms, this is eternity for the believer in Jesus Christ. For the rejecter of Jesus Christ, for the one who says I'd rather live life my own way and not God's way, their end was actually in chapter 20. It ended at the end of chapter 20 with what we know as the final judgment and the lake of fire and what we know as the second death. But for those who have humbled themselves before the cross, confessed they needed a Savior and His name is Jesus, this is our future. So I just want to ask a couple of simplistic questions to help us get a grasp of what this is really going to be like, what we are really going to experience, what we are going to see.

The first question is very critical. In all that we've read, all that we've sung about today and all that we've studied, how do we know this is even true? You would have to be honest with yourself - this does seem like “Biblical pie in the sky.” After all, all former things are passed away; no more crying, no more tears, no more darkness. This is everything we've all hoped for and none of us have ever experienced. And there might be those who say, “This just sounds too good to be true.” So how do we know it's true?

The first reason we know it's true is because John had a vision. Now understand, if humanity does something so they can see the ethereal, so they can see God we call that a hallucination. A vision is when God opens up the heavens, He parts the heavens and says, “Son, I need you to see this.” There are several very famous visions in scripture. One of the most famous is in Isaiah, chapter 6 where the prophet, Isaiah, said he saw the Lord high and lifted up. He saw the train of His robe filling the pillars of Heaven. He had the seraphim come and put the stone upon Isaiah's lips because He knew he was an unclean man. He actually saw God face to face; he saw the heavens open up.

A couple of books later we have a prophet by the name of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, chapter 1 it says that he was looking toward the north and out of the clouds came the throne of God. It talks about all of these wheels within a wheel and that the throne went and came as it chose. There were cherubim at its base.

For a more practical perspective we get to the book of Acts, chapter 10 and there is a man by the name of Peter, one of the early apostles. He was praying one day on top of a roof and the Bible says he had a vision; there was a sheet that was lowered with every form of animal, both “clean and unclean.” And the Lord told Peter never to call unclean that which He declared clean; rise and eat. Then we have what we know as the book of Revelation and you see in chapter 21 the Apostle John says in verse 1, “I saw,” verse 2, “I saw,” verse 3, “I heard.” On and on through chapters 21 and 22 it was “I saw,” and “I heard.”

Now I don't know about you, but I've known a lot of people who claim they've seen a lot of things and they claim they've heard a lot of voices. So how do we know that this vision is something we could literally stake our eternity on? It's because it's not just a hallucination, something man wanted to see. It is a vision from God and it is validated by scripture. Notice what it says at the end of verse 5: “Write: for these words are true and faithful.” And what I want you to understand when it comes to the book of Revelation and the New Heaven, the New Earth and the New Jerusalem is that the visions are verified by scripture.

I want you to notice the order though: it's not that God gave the vision and then they wrote about it and said because I saw it, it must be true. In fact, the opposite is true; God gave the scripture well in advance of the vision so when they saw it they knew that it was from God. When Isaiah said I've seen the Lord high and lifted up that is half the message of what we know as the Psalms in the Bible. Three hundred years earlier the Lord displayed Himself as being holy, displayed Himself as His robe filling the temple and then three hundred years later Isaiah got to see it. When Ezekiel said I look to the north and out of a whirlwind I saw the throne of God, literally hundreds of years earlier a man by the name of Job wrote the

same message. When the apostle, Peter, declared that no one was outside of the grace of God, no one would be shielded from the saving message but all clean and unclean could be saved that was a message that was written down back in Genesis, chapters 12 through 15 when God came to Abraham and said, "I have made you a messenger to all nations." And when the apostle, John, sees this vision in chapters 21 and 22 it literally was about a thousand years earlier when Isaiah wrote chapters 65 and 66 to tell us what this New Jerusalem, this New Heaven and this New Earth would look like.

So when we discuss this subject matter it is true not because we want it to be true. It is true not because John saw something. It is true because the Lord wrote it down and then John saw it and it verified what God had already said. It was not written after the fact.

Now that we have that settled, the obvious question is this: what did John see? Two main items: he saw the replacement and the renewal of items, and he saw the replacement and the renewal of issues. This passage is most commonly known as the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem. It says that the former are passed away. But interestingly in Revelation 21 there is not a whole lot given about the New Earth or the New Heaven. We have, in particular, quite a bit given to us about the "New Jerusalem," that heavenly city prepared as a bride that will descend out of heaven to the earth and where the bride of Christ, those who have believed on Him as their Savior shall dwell for all of eternity.

Turn to Revelation 21: 14-16 where it actually gives us some interesting measurements. "14And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal."

For the sake of time this morning, I want to focus in on the New Jerusalem

because we could postulate a lot about what the New Earth is going to look like and what the New Heaven is going to look like, but we are told, at least in brief, what New Jerusalem will look like. There are several aspects I want you to know about this place known as New Jerusalem. The first one is this: the picture that the Word of God gives us. It mentions furlongs and we'll talk about that in just a moment, but it says its length, width and height are of the same measurement. It is a three dimensional city, not a two dimensional city like you and I are used to. There are several ideas of what shape and/or form this city will be. It looks as if it would easily be what we would call a cube; a cube that measures twelve thousand furlongs long. By the way, a furlong is typically about 582 feet - 1,320 miles if you are curious. But your Bible will say usually anywhere between 1,200 and 1,500 miles.

Let me give you a picture of that. Imagine driving from Washington, D.C. down to Miami, Florida; go west to Dallas, Texas; north to Chicago and then back east to Washington, D. C. That is about the perimeter of this length. Now imagine going up the same distance. It measures that distance in all areas so many say it must be in the shape or the form of a cube. There's nothing wrong with that idea. In fact, it says that the width, length and height are the same.

But there are others who would say maybe the shape is not really a cube, maybe it's a pyramidal shape. You ask why they would say it would be a pyramidal shape. Back in Isaiah 28:16 it prophesied that Jesus Christ was the cornerstone. The stone that is rejected is the cornerstone, the One that establishes the foundation of New Jerusalem. Then over in 1 Peter 2:6 it says the stone that was rejected, this same cornerstone is Jesus Christ. Then we go to Psalm 118:22 and it says the same cornerstone is made the head of the corner. And there are those that look at this passage of scripture and say it's a pyramidal shape building where the head is actually the cornerstone. Can I share with you my honest opinion this morning? I don't think we're going to care. It might be in the form of a cube and it might be in the form of a pyramid, can we just say this – it's going to be big! And the picture that we have is a city like none other.

But not just a picture, it has these parameters that I mentioned to you. You ask how big is that because we're used to length and width but then you throw height into it. When we flew back from the convention this week, you can fly at forty thousand feet and you are still more than a thousand miles shy of being at the height of New Jerusalem. How big is that? If you take the idea that it is in the form of a cube, it is about two billion cubic miles. "Cubic" is the key word there, not two billion square miles but two billion cubic miles. We have the picture of either a cube or a pyramid. We have parameters that are almost infinite in our finite minds of two billion cubic miles. By the way, if you think it's a pyramid then you're only five hundred million cubic miles – a little, small place!

What about the people? After all, it is in verse 8 of this passage that says but those who will not enter. And it says that only those who enter are those who have been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, those who are written in the Book of Life. The question comes up; how much room is that? Can I be honest with you? It's more room than you've ever owned. It's more room than you could ever dream of. You could ask how many people will actually reside in New Jerusalem? Let me give you four of my favorite words when studying the book of Revelation: I do not know! However, there are those who are smarter than I who claim they know how many people have always been on planet earth and if you take a very secular, very academic, non-Biblical perspective, full-blown Darwinian evolution perspective, they claim there have been about one hundred billion people that have been on this planet. If you go more of a conservative Biblical perspective, you can get more of about twenty billion people.

Just for the sake of showing you how extreme this is, let's go with the secular definition. Let's go with one hundred billion people who have been on earth since Adam and Eve. The Bible makes it very clear in Matthew 7 – Jesus said broad is the road to destruction, narrow is the way of righteousness. I think I can defend Biblically that probably at least 51

percent of all of humanity will not be in the New Jerusalem because He said broad is destruction. That would leave about 50 billion people. Now you ask how big is my mansion going to be; I really want to know? Let's just take the smaller parameter, the pyramid, with the bigger number then your measly apartment in the New Jerusalem would have a floor plan of 25,000 square feet over 50 stories high! Are you upset about that? And made of gold that can be seen through! When we talk about New Jerusalem it is literally a structure we can't fathom, we cannot imagine and that is exciting!

But I think the most important thing that John saw wasn't the renewal or the replacement of an item as much as it was the issues of life. I want you to look at verse 4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Let me share with you in Revelation 21 and 22 what is renewed for the believer in Jesus Christ. Death has been replaced by a very distinct life. Notice verse 27, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

You and I know nothing on this planet but death; it's always untimely. We have death of our physical bodies, dreams, relationships, hopes; but yet it says here in the Book of Life, no more abomination, no more death, a very distinct life, a life none of us can even comprehend. A life without death replaces death.

But there is also something else that has been replaced or renewed: a life of sunshine instead of sorrow. Look in verse 23, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did light it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." An existence without sorrow, without depression, without frustration, without angst, without anger, without the blues or without darkness; it is such an existence without darkness - we don't even have darkness because there is no sun because it's always light. There is a different issue; no more sorrow, only Son-shine.

Then there is this third item. So death has been eliminated, sorrow is eliminated; it says no more crying. Crying has been replaced with celebration. Oftentimes people ask what are we going to do in Heaven for all of eternity, are we just going to sit on the clouds with the angels and play our harps? Can I just be honest as a very non-musical individual? That doesn't sound like Heaven to me. What will it be like? I want you to look at verse 24, "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it."

I haven't had the chance to go to a royal parade but I've seen it on television. And if there is anybody who can throw a celebration it is royalty; it is kings and queens. They throw parties like nobody's business. And it doesn't say a king or a queen; it says the kings of the earth. So this world that is now so entrapped by crying, tears and disappointments will have a consistent time of celebration: no death, no sorrow, no crying – why would you not want to go?

It gets better though, here's the fourth thing in Revelation 21:4: no more pain. Pain has been replaced; listen to this word, by prosperity. Look at Revelation 22:3. I mentioned to you the New Heaven, the New Earth, New Jerusalem goes through verse 5 of chapter 22. "There shall be no more curse." Go back to Genesis 3 and you see when Adam and Eve fell into sin. The curse of sin brought death. Death is no longer there. The curse of sin brought sorrow. Sorrow is gone. The curse of sin brought misery, anguish, pain and crying. No more. But it brought pain. And one of the pains that it brought was the Lord told Adam that you will be dismissed out of the Garden and from this point forward you will have to toil among the thorns.

Now for a brief moment I want to address an issue that I'm very concerned with in twenty-first century Christianity. In fact, in just a moment as we talk about a group of our people who are about to go into South America, and we've had a group already this year who went to Africa, even in the United States but all over the world right now one of the greatest "enemies" to Biblical Christianity isn't atheism, paganism or voodoo. It is this thing called the prosperity

gospel. And do you know what the prosperity gospel says? “I’m the tail; I get to wag God and have Him do anything I want, provide anything I want any time I want.” It’s propagating the air waves, it’s propagating the world.

But let me give you a simple definition and don’t take this word too harshly and let me explain it; the word is called “heresy.” Heresy literally just means erroneous teaching. Let me give you the Jeff Meyers’ definition of heresy: the right teaching at the wrong time. The problem with the prosperity gospel is it teaches that the curse has been lifted. I don’t know about you but I walked into it today: I’ve already experienced sorrow, crying and some pain. And you have, too; the curse hasn’t been lifted yet, and last time I checked, work is hard. I came back from a trip and guess what grew in my yard? Weeds! Why? Because it is a cursed world; it is a cursed life.

But the Bible says one day the curse will be lifted and what we know as the prosperity gospel is true in the New Heaven, the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. Anything we need, any time we want it, we’ll say, “Lord, I need it,” and it’s there. No working, no toiling, no anguish, no pain, no sorrow. All those issues of life are one day replaced; not on this side but on that side of eternity.

And that begs the last question: so how do we respond? Having all this information, all the diameters and parameters, how does that change today? How does that change how we live today? How does that change how we live tomorrow? For that we have to go into chapter 22, because beginning in verse 6 it gives us an every day, practical “how-do-we-respond.” I think we need to respond in two areas: we need to respond on the inside and we need to respond on the outside.

How do I respond on the inside? Look at verse 9. “Then he said unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant (the Apostle John had fallen down at the angel’s feet to worship him) and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the saying of this book: worship God.” With all that we’ve studied in the book of Revelation, with all we know about the

New Heaven, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem it ought to make us on the inside more excited about worshipping God than we've ever wanted to worship God in all of our lives because we see what He has prepared for us. We see that when He said I have a mansion prepared for you that He was not lying – in fact, it is actually bigger than you and I could ever imagine. On the inside, it ought to put us prostrate before God, where we worship God. And the worshipping of God, not just on Sunday but on every day, ought to be the primary focus of our lives. It should change how we worship.

But it also should change how we pray. Look at Revelation 22:20. “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” In other words, the trappings of this world should fade away, the things that so entice us should become dismal. In other words, our prayer life ought to be more concerned about eternity and who is going than our little hangnail that's bothering us. It ought to change our prayer life; we ought to be more concerned about praying for our neighbors, those in our community, those on the other side of the planet, those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we grasp chapters 21 and 22 we worship God with an endearing passion and our prayer life changes. Rather than praying just about us it's about praying for others.

But it should also change us on the outside because what we ought to do is take the message, like Jesus says: you should not take the candle and put it under a bushel, you should proclaim it. Look at Revelation 22:10. “And he said unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” In the book of Daniel, God came to the prophet, Daniel, and said I'm going to give you something but don't tell them. In Revelation, chapter 10 He comes to the Apostle John and says I'm going to give you a message; eat it, drink it, take it but don't tell them. When we get to chapter 22 it says every thing that you've learned, what you know about the tribulation, the antichrist, judgment day, the millennium, the New Heaven: tell everybody! Do not keep it sealed. Do not keep your mouth shut; you ought to talk about it, share it and let people know. It ought to change us on the outside because now we know how it ends. We know who wins and we know what it looks like.

But there's one last thing it ought to do and that's in verse 18. "For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." We have studied subject matters that are controversial even within the church, much less outside of the church. And I will testify that when you begin to propagate, promote and proclaim the truth of what we know as the great tribulation, the person of the antichrist, that there is a final judgment and, yes, there are those who reject Jesus who spend forever in an eternity called hell and the lake of fire, it is real easy to say let's not talk about that part. I'm reminded of Luke 12:48 where Jesus said this statement, "To whomever much is given, much is required." So not only should we proclaim it; but we ought to preserve the message.

I want to come to our time of invitation, even though we are in the middle of the book of Revelation at the end and we'll continue next week at the beginning of the text, I want to give you a charge. If you are a first time guest or visitor and I'm not personally your pastor, but I'm going to give you a charge and I mean this from the bottom of my heart because I've been in the classrooms, the debates and the kitchen tables with people: don't let anybody talk you out of it. Don't let any theologian, pastor, television preacher or wacko out there convince you that what you've read will not and is not true. Don't fall for it. You ask, "What if I do?" Listen to what it says: the plagues will be added unto you. I'm not a rocket scientist but I'm not interested in plagues because I've read there are locusts and hail the size of basketballs.

Titus 2 says look unto His blessed coming. The end of the book of Revelation says there is a place that you could never imagine, you couldn't paint; you can't imagine how incredible it is. If you will live for it, pray about it, talk about it and you won't let anybody talk you out of it then the Lord will do exactly what the third verse of chapter one says: He will bless you. Don't let anybody, no matter who they are, what they say or what their credentials are talk you out of the truth that is contained therein. Jesus Christ did not

just come in a virgin birth, He did not just come and live a sinless life, He did not just die on a cross, He did not just arise from the dead, He did not just ascend on high, He is not just going to return one day, He is not just going to win at the Battle of Armageddon, He is not just going to sit for a thousand years in Jerusalem, He is going to reign forever and ever and ever – and don't ever let anybody talk you out of it. Let's pray.