



Sermon Transcript

June 28, 2020

God's One Story of Redemption

Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 21:1-27

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 28, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Revelation 21:1-27

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. 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 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, clear as 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.

Introduction

This morning we come to the final sermon that puts the story of the Bible together. So on one hand, I could say that this morning we come to “the end of the story.” Revelation is the final book of the Bible. The letter “Y” - which stands for “Yet to Come,” is the final letter of CASKET EMPTY. This is the end of the story. There is no further revelation from God that comes after this book. But unlike many stories, the story of the Bible does not end with the familiar refrain, “The End.” Truth be told, the “ending of this story” has no end. It is a story that keeps on going for all of eternity. Which is why, at the end of this story, Revelation 22:20, we find the longing cry of those who have put their hope in Jesus, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*”

As we spend time in Revelation 21 this morning, we will see why one would long for Jesus to return. Granted, there is a lot of symbolic language to sift through in Revelation 21—as there is in the entire book of Revelation—but at the same time there are some rather plain and straightforward statements in this passage that cause us to cry out “*Come, Lord Jesus.*” I would like to highlight three of those phrases for us this morning.

- *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”* Revelation 21:5
- *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling place of God is with man.”* Revelation 21: 3
- *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes . . . for the former things have passed away.* Revelation 21:4

Don't you find these three phrases to be timely things for us to hear? In looking around at what is going on in our country, do you not sense that there is a need for things to be made new? Can you imagine how different this world will be when the dwelling of God is with man? Who here doesn't long for a time when tears and death and mourning and

crying and pain are no more? These are the universal longings of the heart of man. C. S. Lewis said that “if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”¹ His premise is that we are not born with certain desires if the satisfaction for those desires doesn’t exist. For example, the fact that I get hungry indicates that there is such a thing as food to satisfy my hunger. And so the common human longing for things to be right and to know God intimately and for no more pain and sorrow indicates that “we were made for another world.” That world is described for us in our passage this morning.

I love the statement found in verse 6. After the announcement is made from the very throne of God— “*Behold, I am making all things new,*” we are told that this statement is *trustworthy and true*. This is not a fairytale. How do we know this is true? Well not only does this word come to us with the authority of God himself, but he says in verse 6, “*It is done!*” It is a cry that takes us back to the cross when Jesus uttered, “*It is finished!*” Beale says that this new creation “was set in motion at the cross when Jesus cried, “*It is finished!*”² A new creation is coming. God will dwell with man. There will be no more tears. This is welcomed news in the age of coronavirus and racial strife and violent protests and failing governments and injustice, oppression, hurt, anger, division . . . and so on. And so our hearts cry out, *Come, Lord Jesus!*

The Book of Revelation

I realize that in the matter of two weeks we went from Revelation 1 to Revelation 21, skipping over the rest of the book without exploring the fascinating details of the vision that John saw. I have never preached through the book of Revelation, but I must confess a growing interest in doing so after my study the past two weeks. So, hopefully, in the near future we will walk through the book in its entirety. But before we look at Revelation 21 this morning, there are a few things you should know about the book of Revelation that will help prepare you to hear what John saw in Revelation 21.

We noted last week that the word *revelation* means “to see behind the veil.” Through the vision that John has been given, he pulls back the veil that gives us a glimpse of the heavenly throne room of God. And what do we see? We see a “revelation” of Jesus. That is exactly how the book begins in Revelation 1:1, “*The revelation of Jesus Christ.*” First and foremost, the book of Revelation is an extended revelation of Jesus Christ. David Palmer says, “Revelation is not primarily a book about the “end times,” but about Jesus Christ. God reveals Christ’s present rule and future glory.”³ And yet, as you pull back the veil of this glorious revelation of Jesus Christ, the dominant symbol that represents Jesus in this book is one of a *Lamb that was slain*.

In Revelation 5, John is standing in the heavenly throne room of God and he hears the question being asked: “*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*” This scroll contained the purposes of God for his creation and by breaking the seals his purposes would be put into motion. But there was no one in heaven found worthy to be able to accomplish God’s saving purposes; to bring God’s kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. And so John began to weep. His weeping reflects the common human longing for heaven and earth to meet, for things to be right, for God to dwell with man and for no more tears. If no one is found worthy to enact the purpose of God then there is no hope.

As John was weeping, one of the elders said to him, “*Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*” One rooted in the Old Testament would recognize that the connection to the tribe of Judah and King David points us to Jesus, the Son of God. And so with great anticipation, John wipes his eyes of his tears and he looks to find the *Lion of the tribe of Judah* but instead he sees “*a Lamb standing as though it had been slain.*” Revelation is filled with symbolic language. Some of the symbols are obvious to us and some are not as obvious. This symbol is pretty obvious to us who have been rooted in the story of the Bible. The Lion is the Lamb. As the *Lamb of God*, Jesus conquered Satan, sin and death through his death on the cross. And so heaven sings, “*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*”

Don’t forget, John is writing this letter to seven churches who are struggling because of challenges coming from within the church and persecution and opposition coming against them from outside of the church. They are wrestling with everything the church wrestles with today. They were wrestling with spiritual apathy on one side and persecution on the other side—and everything in between that tempts the church to grow lukewarm in her faith, apathetic, cynical or possibly even to withdraw from the church and from Christ. In other words, the picture you get of life in the church in Revelation is that it is hard. But if our king—the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*—conquers Satan as the suffering *Lamb who was slain* it should not surprise us that the call to *endure with patience* is our calling as we saw last week.

That is the point of the 144,000 in Revelation 7. Numbers are very symbolic in the book of Revelation. If you try to read that as literal numbers it will set you off course in understanding the book. The number 12 is the number of God’s people, which is squared to indicate completeness and multiplied by 1000 to connote vastness. The number 144,000 is a symbol for the complete and vast number of God’s people.⁴ Their mission—our mission—is to follow the Lamb by bearing witness to God’s justice and mercy before the beastly nations even if it requires us our lives. And they will conquer

the beast by laying down their lives, just like the Lamb. This will move the nations to repentance. And so like last week, we are encouraged to keep our eyes on Jesus. We are to keep our focus on the vision we have in Revelation 21 so that we may patiently endure. Because this vision in Revelation is sure and certain—*It is done!*—so we can sacrificially and fully give our lives to the *Lamb who was slain*.

As we turn our eyes to Jesus, what is it that we long for? What is it that will help us to endure with patience as we follow the *Lamb of God* in sacrificial service?

God is making all things new

The first thing we see is that God is making all things new. John begins in verse 1, “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*” This quickly takes us back to the very beginning of the Bible—the letter “C” for Creation—where we read these familiar words “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” But we are not long into the story when we see sin enter the world. We saw this in our current study, how time and time again, man wants to be like God by defining for ourselves what is good and evil. It is a rejection of God. It is the de-godding of God. This leads to the brokenness and curse of this world that is seen in our strife, our quest for power, injustice and death. They are the very things that cause the tears, the mourning, the crying and the pain. But now, with a sense of great hope, the one who created all things is *making all things new*.

So what is “new” with this new creation? First of all, the curse of sin and all the chaos and brokenness that goes with it will be no more. That is the point being made when John says in verse 1, “*and the sea was no more.*” This is not a statement that says that there are no oceans in the new heaven and new earth. I can’t help but think that the vast oceans God created in his original creation—that he called good—would also be part of the renewed creation. Instead, using symbolic language, the *sea* was associated with chaos and danger. In Isaiah 57:20 it says, “*But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet; and its waters toss up mire and dirt.*” The picture here is that this new heaven and new earth will be absent of chaos and all that comes with the curse of this broken world. That is the point Isaiah makes when he talks about this new creation in Isaiah 65:17. He says that *the former things* [curse of sin] *shall not be remembered.*” It is what Peter is referring to in 2 Peter 3:13 when he says that the new heavens and new earth is a place where righteousness dwells. It is what Paul means in Romans 8:19-22 when he says that it is a day when all creation is transformed. It is made new.

John quickly moves from the new heaven and new earth to a new city. Look at verse 2. “*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem.*” He is not adding to the picture, he is just

changing the metaphor to tell us something “new” about this new creation. This piling on of mixed metaphors happens all the time in Revelation. We just saw it in Revelation 5 where the *Lion* is the *Lamb*. While these metaphors couldn’t convey two more different kinds of animals, they both point us to Jesus. He is the King and at the same time he is the sacrifice for sin—the Savior. That is what is happening here. You see it again in Revelation 21:9. John hears a voice that says, “*Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.*” What do you expect to see when you are told that you will be shown the bride? You expect a woman to appear dressed in her wedding gown. So John looked for this Bride and instead it says in verse 10, “*and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.*” So the new heavens and the new earth are the city and is the bride—each of these metaphors adding to our understanding of what God is making new.

A city is a social context. It is a people. The fact that God has people in mind here is picked up in verses 12 and 14 where the *names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel* were inscribed on the twelve gates of this city, while the *twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb* were inscribed on the twelve foundations of the city. Again, the number 12 is the number for God’s people. And here you have the fullness of God’s people—*from every tribe and language and people and nation*—with no division, or prejudice, or racism or oppression. Given the current crisis of our day, is this not what we long for and strive for, but find so hard to achieve? *Come, Lord Jesus.*

But then that city is also *the Bride, the wife of the Lamb*. This is a common metaphor for the church, which is often called the bride of Christ. And here it speaks to the intimacy and the joy that the people—the city—will have when this new creation comes in full. D. A. Carson says it this way, “The joy, the intimacy, the pleasure, the knitting together of soul and mind and heart and body; which we best know in our small corner in a well-ordered marriage, is only an indication of the kind of intimacy and joy we will experience when the church is united with Christ forever.”⁵

So what will be new? There will be no more sin and all the chaos that comes with it. There will be no more division for the glory of God will fill his people. There will be a deep abiding joy. Which leads us to our next point—the cause of our joy.

Dwelling of God is with man

We read in verse 3, *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling 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.* When you think back on our journey through the Bible, it is a story of God moving towards man. God moved towards Adam and Even when he clothed them. He moved towards Abraham when

he called him out of Babylon to be his people. He moved towards the people of Israel when he instructed them to build a tabernacle and then a temple, where he dwelt with them. He moved towards us when Jesus *became flesh and dwelt among us*. He moved towards us even closer when he gave us the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. Many of us can even point to ways that God has personally drawn near to us. As the story unfolds, you can see how God moves closer and closer to us. But there is coming a day when in all of his glory, the *dwelling of God will be with man*.

In verses 15-17 we are given the measurements of the new city. The intent of these measurements is not to give us the actual size of the new Jerusalem. Rather, these symbolic measurements indicate that the length and the width and height are exactly the same. In fact, notice again in the measurements the numbers 12 and 144. D. A. Carson says, “it is calling to mind the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles:12 multiplied by 12 equals 144. It is a way of saying all of the old covenant people and all of the new covenant people constitute this unified people of God.”⁶ Once again, the city and the people become one in the same. The vision of this heavenly city is a city that takes on the dimensions of a cube. There is only one other place in the Bible where you see “a cube.” Do you know where that place is? It is the room in the tabernacle called “the holy of holies.” It is where the ark of the covenant was kept. It is the room that only the high priest could enter once a year to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. It is the throne room of God. It is the place where the glory of God was present and where the blood sacrifice for the atonement of sin was made. And now we are told that the entire city is in the shape of the “holy of holies.” In other words, all of us forever will dwell in the presence of the glory of God. Our faith will be sight. We will be with God.

John Piper asks, “If you could have heaven with no sickness, all of the friends you have had on earth, all the food you have ever loved, all the leisure activity you have enjoyed, the natural beauties you have seen, all the physical pleasures that you have tasted and known . . . No human conflict, no natural disasters to speak of . . . Could you be satisfied with that vision of heaven if Christ was not present?”⁷ We tried that! That is the essence of idolatry. The worship of the creation over the Creator.

The greatest treasure of heaven is God himself. The greatest thing that God can share with us is himself and his love. I think part of the reason you have these twelve jewels in verses 18-21 to describe this city is because it speaks to the beauty and sheer delight there is in seeing God. That is what worship is at the end of the day. It is finding our ultimate joy and longing in God. David expresses this longing and the absolute worth of God when he says in Psalm 27:4, “*One thing have I asked of the LORD, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the*

beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” The beauty and joy and longing of heaven is found in the glory and the beauty of God. We were made to know God. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That begins now by making God the treasure of your heart. Only God can satisfy the longings of your heart. What we now know by faith, we will then know by sight. Do you sense God drawing near to you? Draw near to him.

The Former Things Have Passed Away

The final vision of what God is making new is very inviting. Here we are told that the *former things have passed away*. He is referring to the things that bring about our tears, death, mourning, crying and pain. But no more! All the things associated with the curse of sin and death will be gone.

One of the ways this is symbolically envisioned is what John writes in verses 23-25, *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. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.* Again, this is not written to tell us what the sky will be like in the new heaven and new earth—about the sun and the moon and the stars. Who knows? Rather, the idea that there is no darkness and the gates are left open indicates that the nature of man will be so transformed that all is secure and safe. It is at night we lock everything. As he concluded in verse 27, he says of this city, *“nothing unclean will ever enter it.”*

Another way to put it is the way John puts it in 1 John 3. *“We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”* We will love like him. We will know truth fully. We will no longer sin—hurt others, offend others, divide others—all the things that rob us of peace and safety and security. *“Come, Lord Jesus!”*

Three Concluding Thoughts

I began the sermon by highlighting three things that are plain to understand about this final chapter in the story of the Bible.

God is making all things new.
The Dwelling of God is with man.
The former things have passed away.

These things are meant to shape us. They were written to encourage the church to patiently endure. So with that in mind, I offer three closing thoughts.

All of this is ours right now. So Embrace It!

In Christ, we are a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come. We are also told that in Christ there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. Paul says in Romans 8 that not even death—or rulers—of things to come—nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. God is with us. Thus, we are safe in Jesus. Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we don't fear evil. The promises that are to come are already ours and are with us in part. So do not worry. Do not fear. Do not be anxious. Do not fret. Instead, love. If you have Jesus, you have all you need and you can get a taste of what is yet to come.

All of this can be yours. So Receive It!

At the end of this passage, John makes a distinction between those who are in the *Lamb's book of life* and those who are not. He makes this same distinction in verse 5-8. In those verses he talks about judgment and being held accountable for our sin. After mentioning a laundry list of sins he talks about *the second death* and gives a picture of hell. Anytime there is a laundry list of sins mentioned in the Bible, our own failings become evident. Who here can stand before this holy God on their own? No one can! And so we have this great promise in verse 6, "*To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.*" It is reminiscent of what Jesus said to the woman at the well. He told her that he could give her "living water" and she would never thirst again. It is water that leads to eternal life. Listen to the image we see in Revelation 22:1-2. "*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 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 trees were for the healing of the nations.*" The thirst of your soul can be satisfied. Turn to Jesus. Repent of your sin. Receive the free gift of his salvation and love. And all of this can be yours.

All of this is all we need. So Trust it!

Finally, as we made our way through this six-month series, there was a certain tension I held in balance. I wanted you to see the big story of the Bible. At the same time, I wanted you to see the point of the passage we were preaching on that given Sunday. And, I also wanted to connect the passage to what is going on in life. At the end of the day, if this doesn't connect with where we are living, then we are missing the point.

Right now there is a lot of anxiety over what is going on in our country. It is stressful. It is disconcerting. The future is uncertain. But this is what it was like for the early

Christians John was writing to in Revelation. And he was reminding them that we belong to a heavenly city whose foundation can not be shaken. The foundation of our country is being shaken. Perhaps, there are some things that need to be shaken, But this is exposing for me where it is I find my security and I find my rest. Is Jesus really all I need? And if so, can I trust him. Can I really say, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.”* What are you learning about where your trust lies? Put your trust in what lasts! *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Come, Lord Jesus!*

¹C. S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*

²G. K. Beale *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 1055

³David Palmer *CASKET EMPTY New Testament* (Casket Empty Media, 2016) 274

⁴Beale, 61

⁵D. A. Carson *The God Who Is There* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010) 217

⁶Ibid, 220

⁷John Piper, quoted in a sermon by Fred Anderson, knewoodbaptist.org May 27, 2018

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share one way you saw God at work in your life this past week.
2. What is one thing that stood out to you from the sermon this past week?

Diving Into The Word

3. Slowly Read Revelation 21:1-27

What do you learn about God from this passage?

What do you learn about man from this passage?

4. Read Psalm 27. Can you make any connections between this passage and Revelation 21? (Pay attention to what Psalm 27 calls us to do.)

Taking It Home

5. What is one step of obedience you can take as a result of your conversation?