

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/27/92
Revelation 21:1-5 "The Best Is Yet To Come"

Intro: It's great to be a Christian! There are so many benefits of Christianity. We can experience real, lasting Joy, even in the midst of turmoil. We can experience peace, and contentment.

Illust:

Fact: When it comes to Christianity, the best is yet to come!
One of the greatest benefits of Christianity is the Hope of Heaven! Heaven is a real place! Quote: Hymn about heaven

Q: What will heaven be like?

Illust: False claims from people who've "seen" heaven...

Today I want you to enjoy the testimony of a man who really experienced heaven. His name was John. We'll find the description of his experience in Rev 21.

New Series:

Last week, we began a 3 week series entitled "Life Beyond the Grave." There's only one place we can look to find accurate, absolute answers about life beyond the grave--God's Word.

Last Sunday AM, we looked at Luke 16, the story of the Rich man and Lazarus. When it comes to Life Beyond the Grave, Jesus told us there are 2 types of men, 2 destinies, and one critical choice. Then in the evening service, we marveled at the Hope of Heaven Jesus described in John 14.

This morning and next Sunday morning, we want to investigate Rev 21:1-8. This is a mind-boggling passage. John stretched the human language to the max to put heavenly matters into human words. There are 2 destinies in the Life to Come:

Today: "The New Heaven and New Earth" Rev 21:1-5

Next Sunday morning: "The Horror of Hell" Rev 21:5-8

Fact: When it comes to Christianity, the Best is Yet to Come. How do I know?

Proposition: As we examine John's testimony of the New Heaven and New Earth in Revelation 21:1-5, 3 things stand out.

- I. What John Saw (1-2)
- II. What John Heard (3-4)
- III. What John Did (5)

Q: What kind of hope do we have as Christians? What will heaven be like?

I. What John Saw (1-2)

V 1 "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth..."

Let's take a minute to sketch the context:

1. The Book of Revelation = "THE Revelation of Jesus Christ"

*last written word from God, through John (exiled on Patmos)

*THE Revelation--singular, not plural

*Key--This book reveals a Person

The focus in Rev is not so much on events, as a Person, Jesus Christ. He is not only the Savior of the world. He's the Sovereign of the world. And He has the last word, the final say.

2. The Outline of the Book

1:19 "Write the things which thou hast seen, the things which are, and shall be..."

3. Revelation 20

*The Millennial Kingdom of 1000 years (1-6)

*The Final Rebellion and Judgment in the Lake of Fire (7-15)

20:14-15 "And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire..."

There's the backdrop. Now notice again what John saw...

V 1 "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth..."

Watch carefully. The world as we know it will not always exist.

Warren Wiersbe makes a valuable observation in his commentary on Revelation, "Human history begins in a Garden and ends in a City that is like a garden paradise...What began in Genesis is brought to completion in Revelation."

Compare Genesis and Revelation:

Gen 1:1 Heavens and earth created

Rev 21:1 New heavens and earth

Gen 1:16 Sun created

Rev 21:23 No need of the sun

Gen 1:5 Night established

Rev 22:5 No night there

Gen 1:10 Seas created

Rev 21:1 No more seas

Gen 3:14-17 The curse announced

Rev 22:3 No more curse

Gen 3:19 Death entered history

Rev 21:4 No more death

Gen 3:24 Man driven from the Garden

Rev 22:14 Man restored to Paradise

Gen 3:17 Sorrow and pain begin

Rev 21:4 No more tears or pain

Listen. The God we serve is sovereign. He is in absolute control over the affairs of the world, even the universe. He's not taken by surprise. In fact, He has already written down the outcome! Here it is. John saw it. God is going to establish a new heaven and a new earth.

God promised His people a New Heaven and Earth a long time ago.

Is 65:17 (written 700 years B.C.) "For behold, I created a new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."

Is 66:22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain."

God even revealed through Peter how He would make it...

II Pt 3:10-13 "But the day of the Lord will come...the heavens shall pass away..."

God will cleanse and renew the universe by fire. Our Lord taught a coming fiery judgment on the earth. He said in Luke 17:29-30, "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

There was a time, not long ago, when men scoffed at such an idea. It sounded like science fiction to talk about destroying the world by fire. But now, we not only fathom it, we fear it. All of us shudder when we ponder the immense destructive power of nuclear weapons. And think too about the very structure of our earth. We live on the outer crust of a planet that is 25,000 miles in circumference and 8,000 miles in diameter. The heart of the earth is molten heat. Inside this sphere is a seething, boiling, shifting, liquid lake of fire. When these elements get too near the surface, and pressure builds up, what happens? A piece of crust blows off. We call that a volcanic eruption. Our earth literally is a giant bomb!

In fact, do you know what Col 1:16-17 says Jesus is doing right now? "For by Him were all things created...And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."

Listen. Right now, Jesus Christ, the Creator, is holding the universe together. But one day, in His time, He will destroy the universe as we know it. And He will fashion a new heaven, and a new earth. John saw it.

Q: What's God waiting on?! II Pt 3:9 "The Lord is not slack...repentance..."

Q: What will the new heaven and earth be like?

We have very little information about it. God didn't tell us much about its characteristics. He gave us few, if any, landmarks, or colors, or forms (the latter part of Rev 21 does sketch some details).

Key: According to the Bible, God's goal is to place redeemed man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm. Many Christians have been more influenced by Greek thought than the Bible because they envision the life to come as floating around as a spirit on some cloud.

Illust: Cartoon of men floating on cloud

Rev 21 shows us where history is heading. God will create a new heaven and earth. Two things impressed John about what he saw...

1. There was no more sea (1)

That's interesting. Three-fourths of our present globe is covered by water. But in the new order, there will be no more seas. In fact, the new heaven and earth will be radically different from the present one. How will God replace the old? Two possibilities: either by Annihilation or Renovation.

There won't be sea in the New. Why not? In the ancient world, the sea represented the world of the dark, the mysterious, the treacherous. It's symbolic of evil. We're told in Rev 13:1 that the Beast will come up out of the sea.

Is 57:20 "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

The sea is never still. It's constantly churning, changing. There's nothing permanent about it. Perhaps that's why there's no place for it in the new earth.

Illust:

The second thing John saw...

2. The New Jerusalem (2).

V 2 "And I John saw the holy city..."

Watch this carefully. Are you anxious to go to heaven? I am! But heaven is not our ultimate destiny. Heaven is the temporary abode of the saints between death and the resurrection. The climax will come when the heavenly Jerusalem will descend from heaven to take up its permanent location in the new earth.

Q: What's significant about Jerusalem? Much!

It's the city of David, where God established the Davidic covenant. It's where the Temple, "God's House," was located. It's where Jesus was crucified. Then resurrected. Then ascended. It's where the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. It's where the Church began. It's where Jesus will return. How fitting then that history will peak in the New Jerusalem!

Two characteristics struck John about the New City (2 participles):

a. It's Design

V 2 "coming down FROM GOD out of HEAVEN"

The "new Jerusalem" is "from God." He's the Architect, the Designer, the Sovereign Maker. You say, "What will it be like?" I don't know for sure. I have more questions than answers. But this I know--If God is making it, it's got to be good!

b. It's Decor

V 2 "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

When's a woman's most beautiful day in life? Her wedding day! You talk about being prepared!

Illust:

That's what John saw.

Q: Do you long to see what he saw? Do you really? It's a mark of faith...

Heb 11:10 "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God..." (see 11:10-16; 12:22-24)

Illust:

It's really hard to imagine what the eternal city will be like. Words really can't capture the sights John saw. No doubt John was overwhelmed by what he saw. I would have been.

Q: So at that point what happened?

A: V 3--After he saw, he heard! He needed help making sense out of it!

II. What John Heard (3-4)

V 3 "And I heard a great voice..."

Do you know important thing about the new city? Here it is. Brace yourself.

Key: In the New City, God will live with His people!

Right here is the theme of the Bible...

**God is preparing a people for Himself: A Created People (Gen 1:27). A Fallen People (Gen 3). A Redeemed People (Eph 1:7). A Privileged People! Here's the privilege. God is designing a perfect place for us, and He'll be there with us!

Listen carefully to what John heard ("a great voice"--lit. "mega" voice). He heard 11 statements in vv 3-4 that shocked him! (see his response in 22:8)

V 3 "Behold!" = Pay attention! {Do you sleep when God is talking?In church?}

1. Behold the tabernacle of God is with men (3).
2. And He shall dwell with them.
3. They shall be His people.
4. God Himself shall be with them.
5. He will be their God.

The tabernacle of God will be with men. God's Dwelling will be with men (3). You say, "Isn't God 'with us' now?" Yes, but not like He will be!

I Cor 13:12 "Now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face..."

In the OT, God's dwelling was in the tabernacle, and later in the temple (His "shekinah glory"). In the NT, God took up His dwelling among men in the Person of Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14 "The Word DWELT among us." same word in Rev 21:3). In the Church age, God indwells His church by His Spirit (Eph 2:22). But this dwelling can be comprehended only by faith, not by sight. But listen. There's coming a day, when God's dwelling will no longer be by faith, but actually by sight!

Rev 22:4 "And they shall see His face!"

Illust:

Next, v 4 whets our appetite for the bliss of the new order...

6. God shall wipe away all tears (4).
7. There shall be no more death.
8. Neither sorrow.
9. Nor crying.
10. Neither shall there be any more pain.
11. For the former things are passed away.

What will our eternal dwelling be like? After John heard what he heard, notice the words that struck him most--"no more." No more tears. No more death. No more sorrow. No more crying. No more pain. No more!

Politicians talk about a new world order. Friends, that's nothing. One day, God will establish a new universe order! In fact, v 4 says...

"the former things are passed away"--better translation, "the FIRST things..." That is, the things pertaining to the FIRST heaven and earth will be replaced. Life as we know it will be radically renovated.

Challenge: I want to encourage you. The best is yet to come! If you're a child of God, if you have entered into a personal relationship with His Son Jesus Christ, you're in store for joy you can't even imagine now.

Illust:

Tran: Someone may say, "It sounds too good to be true! I want a guarantee! Who guarantees that the best is yet to come?" Look at v 5...

V 5 "And He that sat...Behold, I make all things new."

Q: Who guarentees? Jesus does!
Having considered what John saw, and what John heard, notice...

III. What John Did (5)

Listen again to the words of the Lord of the Universe, Jesus Christ.

V 5 "I make all things new."

What verse does that remind you of? II Cor 5:17 "If any man be in Christ.."

If you have repented of your sins, and placed the confidence of your life in Christ, you already have a fortaste of Rev 21:5. Jesus Christ has made you a new person! You've tasted the benefits of His newness.

Illust:

Watch this. What Jesus has done for us on a personal scale, He will one day do on a Cosmic Scale! This universe is wrecked by sin. Paul put it this way in Rom 8:22 "For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now."

Q: Why does the universe travail? Because of Adam's sin.

But one day, count on it, Jesus will reclaim and restore and revamp and renew this sin-cursed world!

Illust:

Q: What did John do when he saw and heard this?

A: Possibly nothing! It seems he was so struck by what he saw and heard, he couldn't move! Remember, the Lord already told John what to do back in 1:19-- "Write!" And what does he tell him to do in 21:5? "Write!"

I'm so glad John wrote! Aren't you? He wrote for our benefit. And notice this about the words he recorded...

"for these words are faithful and true"!!

The best is yet to come! For whom?

21:27 "they are written in the Lamb's book of life"

If you're a child of God, one day you will enjoy unhindered, direct fellowship with God Himself! If you belong to Christ, you will participate in the new universe order: no tears, no death, no crying, no pain, no sin. If you're in God's family, the best is yet to come!

If you're not, v 8 is for you. We'll face that grim account next week.

Challenge: Be encouraged!

Illust: Trip home from Israel--30 hours, severe headache, waiting in airports, anticipation. What kept me going? I can't wait to get home!

Life is rough now. Never forget, the best is yet to come!