

Week – 10 The New Heaven & Earth and Tree of Life

Before we get to the last two chapters...some thoughts about Chapter 20 in which we see the “wrath of God” poured out over the earth and the judgment on the evil/wicked.

A just and loving God must deal with evil. While we like to imagine God as the loving father, He is a just God as well and He must act to remove evil from the creation He made.

The idea of hell proves God honors free choice! If people choose to exist apart from God, then God will honor that choice.

God is a God of love and grace, but the final judgment affirms that God is also a God of righteousness.

Eternal punishment and separation seems inconsistent with a God of love. Can God’s love eventually overcome humanity’s rebellion and resistance making His love irresistible? God will always act in mercy and love far beyond anything we can imagine.

1. The New Heaven, Earth and Jerusalem—21:1-27

Some observations and thoughts:

- Why does it have to be Jerusalem? The author’s bias toward Jerusalem is certainly evident in his writings. I have never been to Jerusalem, it holds no priority in my mind.
- Is “heaven” as described by John? Will our eternal dwelling place be a walled city like John describes and sees? Why can’t it be a more modern city? Maybe I think heaven will be like New York City or even Asheville, NC.
 - a. John has stated that the earth and heaven had fled (20:11). The sea represents rebellion and chaos, so it is gone as well.
 - b. New Jerusalem – the Centerpiece of the new world. (More on this later)
 - i. It is interesting that “heaven” comes down to earth.
 - ii. The primary focus of heaven is relationship – God comes to dwell with His people!
 - 1. Jesus’ time on earth was a precursor to His time with us for eternity.
 - c. God speaks – for only the second time in Revelation
 - i. He is making all things new – not all new things. The original concept was good, it just went bad due to evil.
 - ii. “It is done.” God has transformed the world. The Alpha and Omega is in control.

1. The entire book of Revelation is about God being in control.
- iii. "The water of life" – no one will want for food, drink or shelter. God will provide all we need.
- iv. The faithful believers will inherit. Who will not? The traditional lists of vices (Rom. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; Gal. 5:19-20) is somewhat altered by John here.
 1. First are the cowardly and unfaithful – remember who John is writing to: Christian churches! John has called for faithfulness throughout his entire work. Those without the courage to remain faithful to Christ will perish.
 2. Liars – those who helped spread the notion that someone or something is more deserving than God to receive ultimate allegiance.
- d. The Holy City
 - i. Contrast the New Jerusalem with Babylon (see – The Two Cities)
 - ii. The city comes down upon a high mountain.
 - iii. Jewels adorn every aspect of the city.
 - iv. The city's wall – although small in comparison to the height of the city – symbolizes security. Yet, the gates will remain open because security is not an issue (v. 25)
 1. The city is 1500 miles tall, the wall is 75 feet tall. Scholars have "explained" this discrepancy for many years. (144 cubits – a factor of the perfect number 12. The wall is perfect)
 - v. Notice there is no temple – God and Jesus are its temple, they dwell among their people, not in some building. (remind you of the Garden?)
- e. A theology of Universalism?
 - i. John states that the kings of the earth and the nations will go in and out of the Holy City. Is this an indication that all the world will be in heaven?
 1. No – some people choose to exclude themselves from God's presence!
- f. Jews and Christians alike are welcome in heaven.

Final Thoughts on Chapter 21

- Ultimately, the hope of Christians lies not in a place – "heaven" – but in our relationship with God. He is our light, our sustenance, our temple.
- The world as it is now is not what God had intended – and we are called in the book of Revelation to remember that. We, as Christ-followers, should

have a different world-view from everyone else. God has not given up on the world – he is making the world new again!

- We should remember to whom John wrote the Book of Revelation – churches. The warning of the book is this: stay faithful, resist evil, live according to God's will. In reading this book, one clearly sees that John agrees with Jesus: "Not everyone who says 'Lord, lord' to me will enter the kingdom of heaven." The Book of Revelation is a call to repentance, a call to faithfulness.

1. Chapter 21 – The River and the Tree of Life

There really is no break between Chapters 20 and 21. It has been put there by editors.

The initial verses are an extension of the description of the New Jerusalem.

- a. The river – this river comes from the throne of God
 - i. Ezekiel saw the river flowing from beneath the temple. Ezekiel's river had trees growing on either side, trees that provided fruit for food and leave for healing (Ezek. 47:21)
 - ii. John has one tree – the Tree of Life
 1. The Tree of Life in Genesis gives life to those who eat of it. This is appropriate for those in heaven, they will live forever.
 2. The tree produces 12 different kinds of fruit – fruit of the month!
 3. The tree's leaves will bring healing to the nations
 - a. Those who were enemies of God?
 - b. God's grace is extended to everyone?
- b. There will be no accursed in the new city – it will be free from evil and evil's influence
- c. They will see his face
 - i. Elsewhere in the Bible, if a person sees the face of God it is disastrous. God always maintained a mystery about Himself.
 - ii. In the New Jerusalem, the people will worship God and see Him for who he is.
- d. Beginning in verse 6, the epilogue begins. These verses serve as:
 - i. Final goodbye – the traditional farewell of other "letters."
 - ii. Connection with the entire book of Revelation. The similarities with the Prologue in Chapter 1 are undeniable.
 - iii. A summary of the major themes of Revelation
- e. The "speakers" change throughout this entire section (see separate sheet)

- f. "These words" – the words that John wrote are trustworthy, they are as trustworthy as any other works by prophets.
- g. "I am coming..." – Jesus speaks here about his future coming. A beatitude is included here: if you keep his instructions, you are blessed.
- h. John is reminded that only God is worthy of worship – one of the major themes of revelation.
- i. Verse 11 is difficult to understand
 - i. It can be a take-off of Daniel 12:10
 - ii. "The end is so near, people won't have time to change."
 - iii. "Since time is short, there is little hope that sinners will repent."
- j. Jesus repeats that he is coming – with reward and punishment.
 - i. Jesus ascribes to Himself the titles previously reserved for God – Alpha and Omega, first and last, beginning and end.
- k. The final beatitude of the book – a metaphor for salvation. Those who have clean robes, by the blood of the Lamb, will be in heaven.
- l. Jesus again testifies to the fact that this (John's Revelation) is His message to the church.
- m. The last section, verse 17-21, are an invitation and an warning
 - i. An invitation to those who thirst
 - ii. A warning to those who might want to change John's words.
 1. This was a common technique in the ancient world.
 - iii. Jesus tells for the third time, He is coming.
 1. "Amen. Come Lord Jesus" – this is marana tha.
 - a. This was a common liturgical phrase used in the early church.

In Summary:

- These final chapters form the basis for the popular view of heaven – streets of gold, pearly gates, river of life, tree of life, etc.. These symbols are powerful portraits of the connotations of **protection, security, beauty, peace, abundance, joy, community, and celebration.**
- We have learned that we may not ever be able to understand the book of Revelation, but we can understand and assimilate this: **God is in control. God can be trusted.**
- It is ironic that we are going to a place for eternity that most people try to avoid all their lives: **a church and a worship service that has no end!**
- John's Revelation is a work of **warning, exhortation and comfort** – warning to believers who would compromise their beliefs, exhortation to Christians to remain strong and faithful and comfort to Christians who have been crushed by the pressures of everyday life.

- John thought and taught that the end was imminent. We have learned that **imminence is a relative term**. However, we must be ready for the end of the world or the end of our lives.
- **Worship is constant heaven**. We have seen that throughout this book. Worship therefore, is important to the church.
- ***Marana tha*** should be our creed if we have any at all – we should constantly be praying Come, Lord Jesus!