

## Eden Restored

### Revelation 21

In this present volatile world, we providentially find ourselves walking through God's plan for defeating darkness and restoring Eden. We have been reminded of this repeatedly since January: There is a higher throne. God is seated on it. It is not unstable, and he is ruling all things well. He is bringing to an inevitable conclusion those things written in the scroll. He initiated human history, he governs human history, and he is bringing human history to a conclusion. Putin, Zelensky, Biden — and every other human leader and nation — are dust on the scales. Hear that from Isaiah 40:15. God brings down kings and sets them up. Hear that from Daniel 2:21. Believe this. There is no human political construct that can accomplish what God is doing. Put another way, there is no perfect human government that can ever accomplish or affect anything of lasting hope. Human governments are a result of the fall. God uses and ordains them, but they are temporary. All of them. They are all agents of his to accomplish his purposes. They will all bow before King Jesus and glorify him as Lord. Today, in Revelation 21, we see the perfect government, if you will. It is the Kingdom of God — the New Creation. That's our home. That's our destiny. This fallen world is simply moving toward that destination. Don't drop any anchors here. We're almost home.

### PRAY

Last week we saw darkness defeated as the Devil, the tormentor, is tormented. Today we see Eden restored, free from sin. The restoration of creation is done by Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus. I hope and trust you have read through the chapter, maybe even several times at this point, as I encouraged you to do. We won't take time to re-read the chapter, but I'll reference verses as we go.

### **It is done! (v.6)**

We presently remain under the curse. At the cross, we heard Jesus cry, "It is finished!" as he completed the work of atonement, paying the penalty for sin. Here, as he completes the total recovery of Eden, he says in v. 6, "It is done!" When Jesus gives the cursing a reversing, and like everything else stained by sin, it passes away and the New Creation comes. There's a new heaven and new earth (vv. 1–2), for the old heaven and earth, everything corrupted by sin, passes away. Today we see the glory of God through tear-blurred eyes and sin-bruised senses. There God's glory is unhindered and clear, as v. 11 notes. The New Jerusalem is the eternal dwelling place, the eternal state, of the church. In the New Jerusalem, all the perfections and beauties of God are on blazing

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display. Some of our folks are in Hawaii at the moment. I'm sure they looked ahead at what the islands feature, beautiful things to see and experience — and Hawaii is a lovely place! I've been there. It pales in comparison to the New Jerusalem.

Our eternal home can be described by two characteristics: **Dwelling Place** and **Deathless Place**. It is the Dwelling Place of God. v. 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. Why is this announced with a loud proclamation? It doesn't take much to understand that this is not humanity's present state. Here is why I titled the sermon ***Eden Restored***. Since Genesis 3, man has been banned from the immediate presence of God. The dwelling place of man has been in a fallen world under the curse of sin with every kind of difficulty and brokenness produced by it. Let's read about Paradise Lost in **Genesis 3:22–24**. In the verses just before, we see straightforward language documenting the treason against God as mankind reached to usurp the throne. Death is set in motion, God pronounces the curse, and then the table of communion, where God was in the midst of the garden with Adam and Eve, is overturned and they are put out. Let's read.

**Genesis 3:22–24** — <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “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—” <sup>23</sup> therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He 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.

The table where God came down in the cool of the evening to commune with the crown of creation is overthrown and lost. It becomes a table of blood and death where animals are brought to be slaughtered as a constant reminder that sin brings death. Always has; always will. At the cross where sin is atoned for Jesus institutes a new table, which we will celebrate shortly. He brings his followers back to the communion table in a spiritual sense, and promises the symbolic table of the Lord's Supper will soon be replaced by a new table of communion as it was in Eden. Now it is done! Here, where all believers are headed, the new table of communion is open, there's a place setting with every Christian's name on it. God again dwells with his people. Eden is indeed restored. The separation produced by sin is no more because sin is no more, as we will see at the end of the chapter. And since sin is not present, the wage of sin is not present.

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**v. 4** — [God] **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.**” Our eternal home is a deathless place. Christians enjoy the eternal life that Christ won when he conquered the grave and rose from the dead. I’m inclined to stand here silent for 5 minutes and let that sink in. Everything about our existence is in the shadow of death. We lose people we love to death. We are dying ourselves, though that is hard to grasp at younger ages. But finally, death shall be no more. Does just the focused attention on that truth cause you to loosen some of the tethers and connections you have to this earth? Everything here is perishing and temporary. In our eternal home, nothing is temporary. Death is no more.

Since death is no more, all the by-products of sin and death are no more. Mourning, crying, pain... these did not exist in Genesis 2. They were produced by death in Genesis 3, but they are absent in our eternal home. God himself undertakes to wipe away the tears and comfort the hurts. As we think about restored communion with God, wholeness, and intimacy with him, consider the nearness of God in wiping away tears. Last week during lunch we could suddenly hear a wail from the far end of the hall. As you might expect, it got louder as the injured child who played a little too rough made his way into this room. When he rounded the corner you could see him carefully scan the room through his hot tears looking for his mom, who was busy in the kitchen. He wasn’t terribly satisfied with his dad, and it wasn’t until his mom came and picked him up that he was soothed and calmed a bit. She had to leave the kitchen to do that. Tears can’t be wiped at arms’ length. When God wipes away the tears of our past hurts and griefs, it will be while taken into his arms, as it were. If the language of **dwelling place** didn’t capture the totality of restored communion, you can’t miss this. Sin no longer creates distance. The righteousness of Christ fits us to be picked up into the lap of God.

One last word on this point: We now only have a foretaste of this future reality. But it is a glorious foretaste. In anticipation of this pain-removing communion, Christ enters in to our suffering. Psalm 103, as we read in the Call to Worship, says he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. He knows because he became dust. He humbled himself, coming in a body of flesh, and became obedient to death on a cross. Hebrews 4:15 says he sympathizes in our weaknesses and temptations. Now sympathy in our suffering from the Lord of glory. Then, the undoing and banishment of pain, and loss, and suffering. Is it any wonder that Philippians 1:21 that death in this present is gain? To depart and be gathered in the arms of Christ, to enter into this healing communion is far better. Live in this reality and loosen tethers that hinder priestly service of the King!

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Let's now turn and be clear about who it is that enjoys this new creation and dwells with God. It is those who have discovered that God alone satisfies their thirst, so they drink deeply of the Living Water that Jesus gives. What we see in v. 6 — To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment — this is what Jesus offered the woman at the well in John 4. Going back before that, it's the water Isaiah describes in **Isaiah 55** — "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live. Those who dwell with God are those who are satisfied with God.

We are all driven by thirsts. Thirsts, desires, wants, loves... these are all synonyms for our *will*. But the word *will* doesn't quite capture the fullness of who we are. We are lovers, all of us, and we are driven by love. The human will is downstream from affections. In my sinful nature I love myself and my sin. These determine what I chase. Apart from Christ what your heart loves is you, and your sin. That is the essence of an unconverted heart. It does not love God, much less is it satisfied in God. It wants, it drives, it thirsts — but not for God. Nor is it satisfied in anyway with God as he is. When Jesus says to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life, he quenching the heart that longs to love God and be satisfied in him. The stony heart of Ezekiel 11 has been replaced by the new heart of flesh that wants to walk in obedience to God, which Jesus equates with love.

There is a God-shaped void in the human heart that only Jesus can fill. The inhabitants of heaven found satisfaction in Christ when they have turned from sin and self to Christ. As they drank of him on earth, so they will in heaven. It is the fulness of the 4<sup>th</sup> Beatitude in **Matthew 5:6** — Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. The appetite reveals the heart.

This past week I was at the seminary in Kansas City for a conference. If you are familiar with Midwestern, you know that it is on the north side of town. We had a two-hour dinner break on the first day. Had you been tracking my GPS, you would have seen me drive from the north side at 5 p.m., all the way through Kansas City during rush hour to the far south east corner of the county. If you are a good detective and if you know me, you could have plotted a course and extrapolated where you thought I would end up. You see, I was hungry. If you read the news, you would know there's a new Whataburger way on the opposite side of town. It took almost an hour to get there but I overcame, I

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conquered all the obstacles and got to what I wanted. I wanted a Whataburger. I love my Whataburger with cheese. My love, my desire determined where I was going and what road I was on. So it is with Christ. Travelers on the narrow road will overcome and conquer unbelief, idolatry, love of sin, obstacles of false teachers and syncretism, opposition and persecution, and they will get to Christ because they know he alone satisfies.

Many are not satisfied with Christ now, and they won't be satisfied then. They are listed in v. 8 — But as for the cowardly [that is, those who professed Christ but chose safety over Christ when persecution came], the faithless, [those who deny the faith under pressure], the detestable, [those who offered a pinch of incense when told to bow before Caesar as lord] as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, [these last five are probably still speaking about those who professed Christ but bent to the pagan culture and came up with an unholy religious stew of Christianity and paganism. It does them no good. It cannot save. It does not satisfy.] Their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Who will be in heaven? Whoever wants to be. Heaven is the dwelling place of God where continual communion is enjoyed by the priests of the Kingdom who delight to serve and glorify God. Who wants to go there and do that? Those who says with the Psalmist in Psalm 42, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Those who are not satisfied with Christ now will not be satisfied then.

A critical question: If what I desire and pursue indicates what I am satisfied with — and it does — what do my desires reveal about my heart? What am I drinking in life to quench the thirst and hunger of my soul? The approval of men is a dreadful substitute for God — it can neither save nor satisfy. Pleasure, entertainment, relaxation... Comfort, security, an easy life... influence, success, control. None of these satisfy the soul. None of these save. All of these are road signs on the broad road to destruction. Hear these words of Jesus and let them go into your heart; do not let a calloused heart chart a course to eternal death in a lake of fire. Jesus said ask, and he will give you living water. "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him," says Jesus, "will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Confess your stubborn sinfulness; own your spiritual poverty. Turn from your sin and self to Christ and live forever in Eden Restored. He offers this to you. He calls you to himself. He has prepared a place for those who come to him. And he is the only way to heaven.

## 6

We'll summarize the rest of the chapter and consider what heaven looks like. What is Eden like? We have seen that it's God's dwelling place — he is with us. And it is deathless — death is no more.

A few more observations: All of creation is restored to its original purpose. All of it. What is its original purpose? God's glory. We see that in the incredible description that begins in **v. 10** and goes basically through the end of the chapter. Man, as the crown of creation, is recovered for God's purposes. What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is glorify God and enjoy him forever. Here that reality is fulfilled. The people of every tribe, language, people, and nation glorify God as he intends. **v. 24** — the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Art, order, engineering, structure, organization are all brought to bear and practiced for God's glory. Do you have these skills and gifts? Practice them well; they will be valuable as they are restored in the New Creation. Precious jewels and metals are no longer things to be coveted or stolen; there's no sin there, so these natural things of creation are rightly purposed to display God's beauty. The city is magnificent in size and structure. It is secure against evil. The patriarchs and apostles God appointed are honored there, all giving praise to the Conquering Lamb who was slain. The precious metals and stones will be magnificent, but they are not the star. It seems that gold there corresponds with asphalt here; the streets are lined with it. That gives us an idea relative grandeur. As asphalt here is not worth focusing on when you are in, say, Hawaii, so gold streets, as impressive as they are, will not be worthy noticing in comparison to the beauty of King Jesus. So brilliant and magnificent is Christ that 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. The brilliant, blazing light of God's glory extinguishes all darkness. The sun is redundant and unneeded. We enter our eternal home through Christ as we are written in the Lamb's book of life (v.27). We are then transformed by Christ. His glorious face will change everything about us, fitting us for eternal service of the King, satisfying every longing of the soul. John writes about this in his first epistle, 1 John 3:2-3 — Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Purify yourself in Christ, believer. Your redeemed life is to be lived for him, to him, and through him forever. We have this certain hope.

PRAY

GOSPEL THREAD