

The Climax and Goal

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[0 : 00] We're looking at bits of the last two chapters of the whole of the Bible tonight from the end of the book of Revelation and I'll pray for us firstly.

God our Father we thank you that you have caused to be written and preserved these words of Scripture and as we come to them tonight we pray that you'll fill us with faith, repentance, hope and eager longing.

For being in your presence for eternity because of the work of Jesus for us. Amen. Well I've been to cities that never close down from London to New York and Rio.

No I haven't been to New York and Rio but I've been to London and Melbourne although some would say it's closed down fairly often. And what's the best city, the best city to live in?

Well is it New York? Maybe after September the 11th a couple of years ago. It would drop down in our estimation. San Francisco got too big a fault line running through San Francisco.

[1 : 06] Bangkok, lots of people think that Bangkok's a great city to live because there's lots of people who live there. But it's pretty smelly and the traffic's pretty bad. Mexico City or Sao Paulo in Brazil, well I mean if you go on popularity they're the biggest cities in the world I think at the moment.

And so they must be the best cities to live in. But maybe not. My father was born in Sao Paulo and he didn't live there very long before he got out of there and came to Melbourne. A few years ago they did a survey.

They do surveys all the time of the most liveable city in the world. And one survey a few years ago, number one was Zurich. Number two was Geneva.

Sydney rated fairly highly. Melbourne not far behind Sydney. All the way down to Brazzaville. Although I suspect that if it was after, if it was a more recent survey you might end up with something like Baghdad at the bottom.

What features do you look for, for a liveable city, a great city? I guess safety. Safety in transport.

[2 : 09] Safety walking on the streets at night. Safety in your home from being robbed or bashed or mugged. Pollution is probably a significant factor. There are lots of cities that are choking with pollution.

Like Athens for example. Perhaps beauty. No one can deny that part of Sydney's attraction is the astonishing beauty of the harbour, the bridge and the opera house.

Maybe it's the reliability of the government as well. So that you have stable, relatively secure government. So that things work. There's a low level of corruption in governmental and public affairs.

Health would be a significant feature I guess. Perhaps too the cost of living. Well I like reading travel brochures. I like reading the travel section of The Age on a Saturday.

I like looking at all these great places around the world and dreaming of going there. Tonight we're going to consider a travel brochure but not for New York nor for New Delhi but New Jerusalem.

[3 : 14] And it comes in these last two chapters of Revelation. The New Jerusalem is the world's most livable city. Or let me say the creation's most livable city.

It's beautiful firstly. We're told in chapter 21 verse 2 that this holy city, the New Jerusalem, was coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The senses of beauty firstly. This is a beautiful city. I remember on my sister's wedding day many years ago, 18 or 17 years ago now, as she and my brother-in-law came down the steps in the reception centre before the reception having just been married.

And I thought to myself, my sister is actually beautiful. The sister that I'd fought for so many years in our home, I thought, she looks stunning.

And that's the picture of the New Jerusalem. It is stunningly beautiful. It's coming down, not steps of a reception centre but coming down out of heaven adorned, prepared as a bride and prepared by God no less.

[4 : 29] Not a human creation with all its flaws but a divine creation coming down from heaven. And then later on in this description, for example, in verse 11, we're told that this New Jerusalem has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel like jasper, clear as crystal.

And then various precious stones are described in verses that follow. This is a beautiful city. A second feature about this New Jerusalem, as you scan your eyes across this travel document and travel brochure, is that God lives there.

You know, sometimes cities are famous or villages perhaps more often famous for the people, the famous people who come from there. They usually don't still live there though. Or the famous people who do live in these places.

You know, you go to Los Angeles, I suppose, not that I've been, but you go down all the sort of famous roads where all the famous film stars live and dwell. Well, here, this is God's dwelling place.

Verse 3 tells us, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God.

[5 : 43] They will be his peoples and God himself will be with them. Here, one of the major factors and features of the New Jerusalem is that God lives there.

Not a temporary dwelling, the senses of a permanent residence. This is not God's sort of holiday home, his summer bungalow somewhere. This is God's permanent dwelling in the New Jerusalem.

And here we see the goal of history. It's why God made everything. It's the goal of the Bible's story of God's purposes. That God will dwell in the New Jerusalem and his people will dwell with him in the New Jerusalem as well.

Because God wants to be with his people. And yet, one of the astonishing features of this New Jerusalem is that there is no temple. If you look down to verses 22 and 23, near the end of chapter 21, I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb.

Well, most major cities have major temples of some sort. In Rome, it's St. Peter's Basilica. In London, it's St. Paul's Cathedral. In Cairo, I suppose it's the pyramids.

[7 : 08] In Jerusalem, it's now the Dome of the Rock Mosque. Whereas once, 2,000 years ago, it was the Grand Temple. In New York, well, it used to be the Twin Towers, I suppose.

In Istanbul, it used to be the biggest dome then built in the world. The dome of the amazing building, Sancta Sofia. Still standing today, but no longer a church.

Now a museum. In Melbourne, of course, it's the MCG, the temple down the road. But here in the New Jerusalem, there's no temple. Not because there's no God or no God present, but because God is so immediately and personally present with those who dwell in the New Jerusalem that he's not confined to a building within the city.

God is present all through the city, face to face with his people who live there. You see, no temple doesn't mean no God. No temple, in fact, means direct access to God and to his presence.

Now that's a major theme of the Bible coming together at the end. Because at the beginning of the Bible, God is immediately present with his people in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve. But as soon as they sin, disobey God and don't trust his promise, then he expels them from the garden and sets up guards to prevent them from re-entering.

[8 : 38] No longer is God and people, no longer are God and people dwelling together. There is separation. And all through the Bible, we see God approaching people at different points to come near to them.

Firstly, in one-off situations, often represented by symbols like fire. So he comes close to Moses in a burning bush. He comes close to Israel on Mount Sinai where they hear his voice.

From the top of the mountain. And then a little bit more permanently, he comes in the tent called the tabernacle to be in the midst of the people as they go through the wilderness and into the promised land.

And then more securely still, in the midst of the temple in Jerusalem, built when Solomon was king in the earth. In the midst of the earth. In the midst of the earth. In the midst of the earth.

Then perhaps a little bit more personally, when God came present to earth as a human being. When his son Jesus became human at Bethlehem.

[9 : 37] And then perhaps more closely, when God's own spirit indwells his own people. But none of that is anything compared to God face to face, personally present in the new Jerusalem.

It's where the Bible story is heading. That the barrier between God and people is totally taken away. So that now people and God have nothing between them.

As they live together in this new Jerusalem. This is also indicated in two other ways in these last two chapters. In verse 15 of chapter 21.

We're told that the angel who talked to John, who has this vision. Had a measuring rod of gold. To measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies four square.

Its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod. Fifteen hundred miles. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall.

[10 : 39] One hundred and forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. Now this is a huge city. It's bigger than Melbourne or Sydney. It's bigger than Cairo or Mexico City.

It's fifteen hundred miles long. Fifteen hundred miles wide. Or should I say two thousand two hundred and fifty kilometres long. Two thousand two hundred and fifty kilometres wide.

So it's as long or wide as Melbourne to Alice Springs. Or London to Athens. It's a big city. Imagine the tolls on the motorway.

But there are none. But not only that. It's two thousand two hundred and fifty kilometres high. The Twin Towers of New York are minuscule by comparison.

The Petronus Towers of Kuala Lumpur are minuscule by comparison. This is a city that is cubic in shape. It's the same height as width as length.

[11 : 39] Now you might think what a bizarre shape for a city to be cubic. You might think it doesn't particularly look attractive. But in the Bible there is one significant thing that is cubic in shape.

It is the Holy of Holies at the centre of the Temple of Jerusalem. So the shape of this new city is telling us that in a sense this whole city is the Holy of Holies.

And all God's people are inside. With an immediate access to God. And the presence of God. And the other way in which this is portrayed. A bit later in chapter 21.

If you see verse 19. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel. The first was jasper. The second sapphire. The third agate. The fourth emerald.

The fifth onyx. The sixth carnelian. The seventh chrysolite. The eighth beryl. The ninth topaz. The tenth chrysolite. The eleventh jacinth. And the twelfth amethyst. Well. Half of those stones.

[12 : 41] We probably don't quite know off the top of our heads what they look like. Why such twelve? Why those twelve? In the Old Testament. The high priest would wear on his front.

Twelve stones. Those twelve. Sewn into. His. Linen. Cloth. On the front of his chest. When he went inside the Holy of Holies.

These stones are embedded in the walls and foundations of the New Jerusalem. Because they're saying that the access that the high priest had. In the Old Testament. To go into the Holy of Holies.

Is now the access. For all of God's people. And all the time. As they live in the New Jerusalem. That is. There is no priest needed. To take us into the presence of God.

This is an amazing city. And it's amazing. Not because of its shape. Or because of the stones. Or because of the lack of temple. The amazing thing is. That God's people dwell with God.

[13 : 43] Face to face. In this city. Well a third feature. We've seen that it's beautiful. We've seen that God is present. Thirdly.

There is no death. Or pain. Or suffering. Back to verse four. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying. And pain will be no more.

For the first things have passed away. So in this New Jerusalem. There's no threat of SARS. There's no water pollution. That causes ill health.

This is a perfect place. There are no funeral parlours. There are no cemeteries. There are no counsellors. For people in distress. There are no hospitals.

Or doctors. Or nurses. Presumably. Because there is no sickness. There's no death. There's no pain. There's no suffering. And the reason why there is none of that.

[14 : 39] Is because there is no evil. And no sin. For in the end. It is sin. That has led to the decay. The suffering. The evil of our world.

It's all gone. It's all perfect. No sin. No evil. A perfect place. Imagine a sinless world.

What an extraordinary change from our world. No locks on your cars. No locks on your door. No need to sign and have all sorts of pin numbers for your bank accounts or anything like that.

There will be no courts or police. No security officers. No bouncers at nightclubs. No broken families. No computer viruses. And the list could go on and on.

A radically different life. A perfect life. No sin. No evil. And none of its consequences. A fourth feature of this new city.

[15 : 41] Is that there will be people of every nation there. In many ways we might say well that's not much different from Melbourne really. Or any other major city. Usually in the western world.

Verse 24 tells us that towards the end of chapter 21. The nations will walk by its light. And the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

This is a picture of a city. Where there are people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Earlier in the book of Revelation. One of the visions that John had of heaven. Had people from every nation, tribe and tongue singing the praise of God.

Here is a multicultural city. But not one that has some sort of ethnic ghetto. Or hostility or race rights. Or anything like that. Here is a perfectly harmonious city.

Where there are people of every tongue, tribe, race of the earth. Freely members of this place. Here is the promise of Abraham fulfilled.

[16 : 41] That not only the nation descended from him. But that all those who bless him. From any nation. Are brought together. In this perfect place.

But the fifth feature that we must notice. Is that there is exclusive entry. Because we are told. That the number of people are denied entry. Not quite your Molly Meldrum's denied entry into the United States.

But nonetheless. Verse 8. The cowardly. Faithless. Polluted. Murderers. Fornicators. Sorcerers. Idolaters. And liars. They are not allowed entry.

Their place is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. The second death. Or what we might call hell. The end of chapter 21.

In verse 27. Nothing unclean will enter it. Nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood. And then over in chapter 22 verse 15. Outside the city.

[17 : 42] Not allowed into it. Are the dogs and sorcerers. Fornicators. Murderers and idolaters. And everyone who loves and practices falsehood. There is exclusive entry. It's a warning to us to be careful how we live.

So who is allowed in then? Well chapter 21 verse 7 said. That those who will be part of this city. Are those who conquer. They will inherit these things.

Those who conquer. Is it saying that only great mighty warriors will enter this city? No. Because the language of conquering. Has been throughout the book of Revelation.

And those who conquer. Or in other translations overcome. Are those who do so. By the power of Jesus death. They are the ones who conquer.

Those who trust Jesus powerful death. That overcomes sin. The devil. And evil. At the very end of chapter 21. Only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

[18 : 43] Will enter. It's God who writes their names. In the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb is Jesus. Jesus who died as our sacrifice.

It is Jesus death. That enables people to enter this new Jerusalem. In chapter 22 verse 14. Those who are unable to go in.

Blessed are those who wash their robes. So that they might have the right to the tree of life. And may enter the city by the gates. He's not saying. Go back to your washing machine.

And pull out your Omo. No. Washing your robes. Is washing them. In the blood of the Lamb. It is those whose sins are washed away. By Jesus death.

That have the right to enter. You see then. There is an exclusive entry. Because various groups of people. Are kept out. The evildoers.

[19 : 37] But those who do enter. And are allowed to enter. Are those who are allowed. Or enabled to enter. Because of Jesus death for them.

Not because they're good enough. But because Jesus died for them. And that then leads to perhaps the best feature. Because when I look at travel brochures. And think.

Oh that would be a nice place to go. Usually they're prohibitively expensive. I mean Paris costs a fortune. It's a nice place. But it's very expensive. London is the same.

But this city is free. That's an amazing feature. You never see that in travel brochures. They might have sort of free car hire. But you've usually got to pay for. You know.

Return airfares and other things. Before you get that sort of free deal. But this is totally free. This city. Chapter 21 verse 6. Firstly says.

[20 : 34] He said to me it is done. I'm the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water. As a gift. From the spring of the water of life.

And later on in chapter 22 verse 1. We read that this river of the water of life. Runs right from the throne of God. In the centre of the city. And it runs through the city. It's free.

Free entry. And free living. In the city as well. This is a free city. Free water. And also free food.

Chapter 22 verse. The end of verse 2. And into verse 3 says. On either side of the river is the tree of life. With its 12 kinds of fruit. Producing its fruit each month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Free. Free to eat. Free water. Free food.

[21 : 33] Free from God. Free water. Intriguingly. The word that's used for the tree of life here. Is an odd word slightly. It's a word that's often used for dead wood.

Dead wood doesn't usually produce fruit in its season. But the tree of life. Which was found at the beginning of the Bible. And has hardly ever occurred again in the Bible.

The tree of life. Is dead wood. I suggest because. The tree of life. Is the cross on which Jesus.

Was crucified. That's where our life comes from. And it's free. Provided free from God. For us.

Not because it's cheap. And not worth it. It's actually a beautiful. Fantastic city. Highly expensive really. But the cost is paid.

[22 : 32] In total. By God for us. A few years ago I went to Rome. And I was. Because of a. Someone in this parish. Who had a connection with someone in Rome.

I was able to be picked up from the airport. By a nun. In a little fiat. And was put up in a villa of a convent. For a week. Free. With free meals.

If I wanted them. Up at the refectory. Of the. Of the convent. Oh it was fantastic. To have such. Provisions. Not that I. Had that many meals there.

But it was a great place. Free. Now let me tell you. The rest of Rome wasn't free. And parts of it are very expensive. This city is totally free. Free entry.

Free living. Paid for by Jesus. In dying on the cross for us. Now some of you know I look forward to holidays. And sometimes even begin to count down the days towards them.

[23 : 33] Looking forward to seeing new places and so on. Well the thrust of this travel brochure of the new Jerusalem. Is that we should be longing eagerly.

To arrive here. In chapter 22 verse 7. At the end of the main section about this new Jerusalem. We're told. In Jesus words. See.

I am coming soon. And then in the last part of the chapter 22. That thought is echoed again. In verse 12. See.

I'm coming soon. In verse 17. The spirit and the bride say come. And let everyone who hears say come. And let everyone who is thirsty come.

And then in verse 20. Surely. I am coming soon. You see this. Book. This whole Bible. If you like. Is inviting us to the new Jerusalem.

[24 : 30] A place built by God. Prepared by God. That is beautiful. Where God dwells. Where people of every nation are welcome. Where there is no sin or evil. There is an exclusive entry.

But a free entry. Enabled by Jesus death for us on the cross. This is a great place. This is the world. This is the universe's. This is eternity's most liveable city.

And notice how it oozes with life. From its centre. From the throne. Runs the river of life. And on either side of it is the tree of life. With its fruit. This is a city of eternal life.

This is a city of life. In all its fullness. And its abundance. This is a city of life. Provided by Jesus. Who is the life.

The resurrection. And the life. This is what God made us for. This city. It's the garden of Eden. With its river of life. And tree of life.

[25 : 31] And presence of God. But better. And it will never. In a sense fall apart. Like the garden of Eden did in Genesis 3. Will you accept the invitation to this city?

Does it capture your imagination as you read this travel brochure? Does it make you long to visit it? To dwell in it? To spend eternity in it? With God?

Well it's free. Free entry. If we trust Jesus' death. That opens its doors for us. But maybe you're already a Christian.

Are you longing for heaven? Because so many Christians aren't. So many Christians long for the pleasures of tomorrow on this world. Rather than the eternal and lasting pleasures of heaven.

We are to have our sights on heaven. To long to arrive at this beautiful eternal city. And the presence of God. This is our destiny and our destination.

[26 : 41] And we ought to be longing for it. As the writer here says. Come Lord Jesus. John is saying at the very end of the Bible. In words that we're meant to echo and share with him.

We want to go there. And we want to go soon. Come. Lord Jesus. Come soon. Come.

Come soon. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come.

Come. Come. control. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come.