

**Trinity Baptist Church**  
**Easter Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
**Romans 8:16-21; Revelation 21 – 22**  
**Resurrection after Resurrection**

On Good Friday, we looked at how Jesus' death and resurrection opens for us the way to heaven (or "paradise" as Jesus calls it). But heaven is not the final hope for God's followers. So, today, I want to take that one stage further to look at our ultimate hope, which Jesus' death and resurrection guarantees: the day when Jesus will return to this Earth, and God will resurrect the whole of creation to join it to heaven! We're going to hear about that in two readings now, and I'll say more about it a bit later. So, first from Romans 8:16-22

**[Read Romans 8:16-22 (Contemporary English Version)]**

*16God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his children. 17His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him.*

*18I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. 19In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are. 20Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope 21that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children. 22We know that all creation is still groaning and is in pain, like a woman about to give birth.*

The next reading consists of sections from the last two chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21 and 22). When it talks about "the Lamb," it means Jesus. He's called "the Lamb" because he sacrificed himself in our place so we could be set right with God, like the lambs in the Old Testament were sacrificed to make people right with God.

**[Read Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5, 12, 17 (CEV)]**

***21:1**I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and so had the sea. 2Then I saw New Jerusalem, that holy city, coming down from God in heaven. It was like a bride dressed in her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband.*

*3I heard a loud voice shout from the throne:*

*"God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. 4He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever."*

*5Then the one sitting on the throne said:*

*"I am making everything new. Write down what I have said. My words are true and can be trusted.*

*6Everything is finished! I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give water from the life-giving fountain to everyone who is thirsty. 7All who win the victory will be given these blessings. I will be their God, and they will be my people" ...*

***22:1**The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where God and the Lamb were seated. 2Then it flowed down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is a tree that grows a different kind of fruit each month of the year. The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.*

*3God's curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God 4and will see him face to face. God's name will be written on the foreheads of the people. 5Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever ...*

***12**Then I was told:*

*"I am coming soon! And when I come, I will reward everyone for what they have done" ...*

***17**The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"*

*Everyone who hears this should say, "Come!"*

*If you are thirsty, come! If you want life-giving water, come and take it. It's free!*

### **Song**

We're going to have a quiz before I go on. On the screen are going to appear a number of local beauty spots. All you have to do is name them. Keep your own score, and I suggest you play as a family or household, but you can play against each other if you prefer.

#### **[Beautiful Places Quiz]**

We have some beautiful places in and around Bexley Borough. Yet, there are things that can spoil their beauty. Litter, for instance. Or dog's mess. Or sometimes you might go there and hear other people arguing or shouting at each other, or see a gang up to no good. All these things are small examples of what the Bible calls sins – they reflect a lack of concern for God's creation or a degree of brokenness in our relationships. Equally, these beautiful places might be tinged with sadness for some of us because of memories of someone who has died. Death, too, is the *indirect* result of human sin, because death only entered the world as God's judgement on humanity's desire to live life *their way*, instead of following *God's way*.

So, in Romans 8, Paul talks about creation *groaning in pain*. When humans first sinned and disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, God put a curse on the ground to make life harder. Sickness, decay and death were introduced into the world. And all the ways that we continue to exploit the world and damage one another add *more* suffering to creation. So, creation groans, longing for freedom.

But those groans, Paul says, are not just expressions of pain. They have a purpose which is amazing. Creation is waiting to *give birth* to a *new* world that is free from all sin, and therefore free from all suffering, pain, sickness and death. Creation is waiting to be resurrected to new eternal life, just as we are. When Jesus rose from the dead, *his* resurrection became the guarantee that *we* will also be resurrected and *all creation* with us.

That's what the Apostle John saw a glimpse of in Revelation 21 – 22. Did you notice in that reading that the Holy City, the New Jerusalem came down *from Heaven to Earth*? It is the resurrected Earth that is pictured here. Now, Revelation contains a lot of pictures that are metaphors. They convey *truths*, but are not necessarily to be understood *literally*. So, we shouldn't necessarily expect to one day walk around on streets that are literally made of gold, or for the New Heaven and Earth to be confined to a cube-shaped city. Rather, the New Jerusalem is a picture of God's dwelling place – of heaven itself come to Earth. And the description of it as "a bride dressed in her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband" is meant to convey the loving care and attention that God has put in to making our new home *stunningly beautiful*! The glorious beauty that now characterises Heaven will be brought to Earth and the two realities will become one. Heaven on Earth. Creation resurrected.

It's a bit like the TV Show, *DIY SOS: The Big Build*. If you haven't seen the show, what happens is that a team of builders are asked to solve a problem in someone's home. Often there has been a family tragedy, like someone being paralysed and so no longer able to move around the house or garden easily. In that scenario, the team might be asked to build a lift in the house, widen the doors, install a wheelchair-friendly shower, and build a ramp into the garden. But, when the family moves out of the house while the work is completed, loads of local tradespeople will freely offer their time to transform the *whole* home and garden for the *whole* family into something that is beyond their wildest dreams. That's what God is going to do for his world – he's going to transform it beyond our wildest dreams!

I find this a really helpful truth. For I can imagine a better version of *this* world. Imagine all the stunning beauty of this world – Mount Everest, Niagara and Victoria Falls, The Amazon Rain Forests, Ayres Rock – or perhaps something even more stunning than we've ever yet seen! But imagine it with no wars ever, and no-one ever hurts anyone else, and no-one ever teases anyone else, and no-one ever goes hungry, and no-one ever exploits anyone else, and no-one ever

gets sick or dies. That's what heaven on earth *will* be like, for Jesus revealed to John that "there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever."

Jesus also said, elsewhere, that there's going to be a great *feast* (e.g. Matthew 8:11; Luke 14:15-24; Revelation 19:9). All the best tasting foods you can imagine – and none of them will ever be bad for us! Then imagine how fresh the river of the water of life must be – as clear as crystal. Imagine how good the fruit tastes from the tree of life. Imagine living in a world where you always feel completely safe and alive because you're surrounded by God's light. Imagine a world where people from every nation, tribe, people, and language talk, and work, and play, and worship God happily together, and understand one another fully without the need for an interpreter. Imagine meeting people who lived centuries before you and centuries after you – like time travel without the need for a Tardis! Imagine enjoying all of this with a brand new body that never feels old or gets worn out!

That day is coming, when everyone who is now in heaven, and every follower of Jesus who is still alive when Jesus comes back to earth will experience all these things and even better things than we could ever begin to imagine. Jesus said, "I am coming soon! And when I come, I will reward everyone for what they have done" (Rev 22:12)

And most important of all: God will be right there with us. "God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people" (Rev 21:3). Imagine seeing God face to face, and hearing him laugh as he says to you "It's good here, isn't it?" Imagine never having to leave his presence, or feel that he is far away, ever again!

C.S. Lewis describes it beautifully at the end of his last Narnia book – The Last Battle. Aslan the Lion, who represents Jesus, tells the children that the train accident they thought was a dream was real, and they have actually died. But then he adds, "The term is over: the *holidays* have begun. The dream is ended: this is the *morning*.' And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were *so great and beautiful* that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most *truly* say that they all lived *happily ever after*. But for them it was only the *beginning* of the *real* story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the *Great Story*, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is *better* than the one before."

The Narnia Chronicles are written in the style of a fantasy story. But they are written to help us to understand something that is absolutely true and real – which, in that last section, is the New Heavenly Earth to come "in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Jesus said that all it takes to guarantee our place there is for us to turn from our sin – the ways in which we live our lives without reference to God – to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and to start living our lives for him instead of for ourselves. Then Jesus' death and resurrection guarantees for us that we will share in this glorious reality where every chapter is better than the one before. And even now, we can enjoy a foretaste of the wonders to come, as we enjoy life lived under God's blessing. There is never a better day to start this journey than the day that is called Today.

So, if you haven't already begun that journey, and you'd like to start it today, you can do so by praying after me this simple prayer:

"Father God,

I admit that I have tried to live life without you, and I know now that that hurts you.

I don't want to do that anymore.

Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to be my Saviour.

I believe he died in my place and took my sin on himself, so I can be forgiven.

I believe he rose again to eternal life.  
And because he lives, your world will be resurrected.  
I want to join Jesus in that wonderful new world forever.  
Help me to learn how to follow him from today for the rest of my life.  
For I ask it in Jesus' name.  
Amen"

If you prayed that prayer, I'd love you to get in touch with me, so we can support you. My contact details will come up on the screen at the end of this service / are on our website. Alternatively, if you're not *quite* ready to pray that prayer *today*, but you want to find out more about Jesus, why not join our Alpha online course on Sunday evenings, starting 25<sup>th</sup> April? It's a chance to explore what the Christian faith is all about in a relaxed, open way. We'd love to see you there. May God bless you this Easter and beyond.

**[Pray]**