

Revelation 21

1 Then I saw a **new** heaven and a **new** earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the **new** Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything **new**!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Intro I put my green shoes back on today. Green because today Trinity Sunday marks the beginning of what is known in the church as *Ordinary time*. A bit boring after the joy and excitement of Easter and Ascension and Pentecost. Maybe a picture for many of us: perhaps there are times especially in the last couple of months when we have been deeply moved by the death of Jesus, we have been thrilled by his resurrection amazed at his ascension and excited by Pentecost. But when we get into ordinary time: back to that challenging task at work on a Monday morning, revising for exams at school, having to do yet another load of washing or deal with that difficult neighbour, how does the resurrection of Jesus help us then.

If it's difficult for us, how much more so for John, exiled on the barren island of Patmos, cut off from his friends and loved ones; how much more for the people to whom he was writing being thrown into prison for their faith, ostracised by their neighbours and families, under threat of death or torture for refusing to bow down to the Roman emperor. What did the resurrection have to say to them?

You could say that the whole of the book of Revelation was written by John to change our perspective, to lift the veil and enable to see the true realities all around us but which lie just beyond our 5 physical senses.

Rev 4 v.1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.

And what John sees and shares with us in this chapter is a preview of our future – and what a wonderful future it is.

A completely new creation

New heaven, new earth,

The Greek word for heaven = both heaven and the heavens

Both the spiritual realm of God and physical sky we see on a clear night

Here heaven = sky, so a new heaven and a new earth = the whole material creation around us. Our future destiny will be solid, physical

The reason we can be sure of this is because of the resurrection of Jesus.

Colossians 1: ¹⁵ The Son is ... the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,

Jesus is the first citizen – the prototype of this new creation. So his resurrection body shows us what we are going to be like in heaven:

Not an airy-fairy ethereal ghost but one who can be hugged and embraced, who on that first Easter evening ate a fish supper. Think of Thomas; Jesus breaking bread at Emmaus, making breakfast on the beach.

C.S Lewis in the Great Divorce. The reason Jesus can appear in the middle of a locked room is because he was more solid than the walls were. He could walk through them as easily as you or I can walk through a bank of fog.

This new creation is not going to be totally different from the creation we know and love, but it is going to be creation made perfect, as it was meant to be – and that includes you and me:

Renewed bodies, renewed minds, renewed souls

The unique person that each one of us was created to be

Now some of you might think there is a fly in the ointment: new heavens and a new earth but apparently *no longer any sea. I love the sea !...*

Symbolic/metaphorical = the forces of chaos

Isaiah 57:20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.

Rev 13 the beast who blasphemes God and wages war against God's people comes up out of the sea.

The sea is that demonic, ungodly, self-aggrandizing culture which gives rise to all the evil in the world today – but in the new creation will be **no more**.

It will quite simply no longer be there to ruin God's beautiful creation.

This is why the new creation will be a **place of joy and peace**

Wiping away every tear, There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain

All the grief, sadness and sorrow of this present time will be no more

God has a special place for us in this new creation.

v.2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

What is this city? Maybe not our idea of heaven; a beautiful garden, a lovely English valley (*Selborne*) not a city. But heaven is not us wandering lonely as a cloud with or without God, or even with our family and best friends. It's being part of the community of God.

The new Jerusalem is God's people made perfect and living in perfect harmony with one another and with God. Now introverts among you please don't panic ! I am not saying that we will spend our time in heaven in one huge worship meeting, although Revelation suggests it might include those – as in any city, there will no doubt be places we can be on our own with God, or places with just a few. There won't just be parks; I am sure there will be all the wonders of our present beautiful planet, but we can't be part of heaven without being part of a community..

This is what the vision means when John sees the city *prepared as a Bride*. For this community is the bride of Christ, the church, the family of God. The good news is that every single member of that family is going to be beautiful, lovely, a delight, because they will have been prepared, made ready and have become the person God created them to be

I have 3 questions (*list them*)

1. When did the preparation take place? The Bride is already prepared, so when did this happen? Preparing a bride takes a long time (*early weddings not a good idea – how much more for the Bride of Christ not just cosmetic but the whole person*). The answer is **now**, in our present age from the time Christ ascended nearly 2000 years ago until the time he returns in glory with the new heaven and earth. Those early Christians undergoing such tough times and persecution were being prepared, refined in the fire to become the purest gold. That plain ordinary coal being put under such enormous pressure would become the purest diamond.

The preparation was going on then and it's going on now

2. Who is doing the preparation? Well, Paul tells us in his *Ephesians 5²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without*

stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. It is Christ who is preparing his own bride, you and me.

3. Where did the preparation take place? You might well say *Here on earth of course – that’s where we are.* That can’t be denied, but John describes this city, this Bride as coming down out of heaven from God. The risen Lord Jesus has ascended to heaven, but He is with us until the end of the age. For both those things to be true it must mean heaven is not a million miles away in the far blue yonder, but right here - it’s just that we cannot see it, but it’s all around us. We know everything is made up of molecules, atoms, electrons and even tinier quantum particles: Higgs bosons etc, but of course we can’t see them – that whole reality with the naked eye. In a similar way we cannot see heaven with our naked eye, but it doesn’t mean it’s not there, because God tells us it is the greatest reality.

Now we may sometimes glimpse it with our mind or our imagination; we are more likely to grasp it with our heart, our soul, our spirit.

Again in *Ephesians*, Paul writes in ch.1 ¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,*

God wants us to understand that all our messy everyday lives are not meaningless, but through it all a wonderful process is going on as Jesus prepares us, as he moulds us and models us and scrubs us clean and files down the rough edges. Our ordinary time on earth is also time in God’s heavenly beauty parlour (although its often more like an industrial workshop). He wants us to see this heavenly perspective with the eyes of our hearts for it changes everything. *The Turkish rug workshop.*

He also wants us to know he is preparing us for the most glorious destiny, the heavenly Jerusalem where we can enjoy the most perfect, complete, intimate relationship with himself *God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them... I will be their God and they will be my children.*

This future is so certain that Jesus can say *It is done – it’s already happened.* The reason he can say that is that He is *the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.* He is beyond time, He’s already been to this future, in fact he probably lives in this future as well as our present. We need to learn to see it through his eyes.

I spoke at the beginning about ordinary time and Monday mornings. But in Jesus’ time, Saturdays were the day of rest and Sundays were the first day of the new week; Sundays were like our Mondays. But that all changed when Jesus dealt with death on the cross and shouted in triumph: *It is finished – JOB DONE!* Those ordinary Sundays became the day of resurrection. For us every day is that transformed first day of the working week, the day of resurrection. A day when the risen Lord Jesus is preparing us here on earth for new creation, having seen the completed job already in heaven.

Paul writes in *Romans 8:* ¹⁸ *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God – that’s you and me - to be revealed.*

Can you see it? Do you long to see it? Jesus says: *To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.*”