

Revelation 20:11 – 21:5; [22: 1 - 7]

Revelation 20 ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. **Rev 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. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.'

Revelation 22 ¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶ The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.'⁷ 'Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.'

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Introduction

Today we come to the end of our series *Promises kept* which has been helping us look at the whole story of the Bible. We started with creation in Genesis back in June and now we have reached the end of Revelation.

Where have we got to so far... God has sent his Spirit to live in his people, enabling them to live a new life and be witnesses to his love and grace in their neighbourhood and the wider world. So our purpose in life is now to be devoted to God, to one another and to telling others the wonderful truth about God. However, as we have seen, this has not always been at all easy and indeed can often lead to great suffering.

I hope you enjoyed the Olympics. It was wonderful to see the total joy of the various British winners of the gold medal – I particularly enjoyed the women's hockey team's ecstatic celebrations after winning the gold medal after the penalty shootout. Without exception the athletes have spoken of how all the difficulties and sheer daily slog of training over the last 4 years has been made worthwhile by their victory. Often they have spoken of how visualising this moment of victory has been the one thing that has kept them going.

Mercifully you and I are probably not called to that punishing daily routine of training, but nevertheless there are times when life seems like a hard slog, sometimes with major setbacks and challenges thrown in for good measure. If it's sometimes like that for us, how much more was it like

that for the Christians for whom John recorded his revelation from God. Often, they were 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, having to see loved ones killed and imprisoned. Sadly, even today that experience is very similar for some Christians in different parts of the world – Whether our circumstances involve severe suffering or just the mundane challenges of living in a broken world, it helps if like those Olympic athletes we can visualise what the old carol calls *the age of gold* – the glorious destiny that awaits us in heaven. And this is what our final session in our overview of the whole story of the Bible is all about..

Now, the book of Revelation is written in a particular style known as ‘apocalyptic’, which is full of graphic imagery and symbols. Our own world is the same. If I told a young person who had never previously left the outer Hebrides, that in London he mustn’t cross the road until the little green man told him to, he might think we had gone completely bonkers. But for you and I, who are familiar with pedestrian crossings, it makes perfect sense, because we understand we are talking about a symbol or image on the crossing lights.]

In Revelation God re-assures his people that one day there will be a day of judgement for everybody on this planet, when everyone who has ever lived will be called to account for their lives. *The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* There will be a sense of total justice, everyone’s deeds, both good and evil will be recorded. Now in many ways this is great news, especially if you are living in a time of persecution and oppression. It’s great news that all the injustices of this life will be made right and that those who have oppressed, persecuted, tortured, or falsely imprisoned you or your loved ones and maybe even have murdered them, will be made to account for their crimes and brought to justice.

However, there is another side to this, which is how *we* will stand before God. The problem is everyone will see that they have fallen so far short of being the people they were called to be. Indeed, who can bear the scrutiny of a holy God for everything they have ever done? The answer is of course no-one, no-one at all, no-one except the Son of God, Jesus himself. There is therefore only one hope - that our name is written in the Lamb’s book of Life.

What is this Book of Life? *viz Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father.* So how can I be sure I am one of those people that my name is written in the Lamb’s book of Life ? In the gospels Jesus says *he will acknowledge before God those who acknowledge him before men.* I need to be someone who acknowledges before all that Jesus is my Lord and Saviour. As John puts it elsewhere in the famous verse of *John 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* Our life-line, can never be how good we have been because we shall always fall short; it can only be by depending on the grace and forgiveness of Jesus alone.

Rev 20¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. This is apocalyptic imagery and we need to understand that the lake of fire is not so much an image of the torment of burning - but an image of total destruction and annihilation, from which there is no return. As John says: ***The lake of fire is the second death***

For those whose names are not in the book of Life, the day of judgement will be an overwhelming experience when their lives are examined in the light of God’s holiness. Think for a moment of Isaiah’s response when he came into the presence of God in all his holiness: *Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips.* Now, if Isaiah – a righteous prophet of God, felt that way, how much more will ordinary mortals experience that devastating *Woe is me.* It may even be that in that terrible realisation of their true nature that awful *Woe is me*, the 2nd death, annihilation, will be something they actually long for.

After the old creation with all its corruption and death has passed away – has been utterly destroyed, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

In this new creation there is no death or dying, no spiritual powers of evil, no pain or suffering - and it is a place where the throne of Jesus is central, in other words, where everyone and everything focusses on Jesus as their beloved king and saviour. This is why there is no place in the new creation for those whose name is not written in the Lamb’s

book of life – because if someone is *not* willing to acknowledge that Jesus is both their King and the one who alone can save them, they will be totally out of place in heaven.

In many ways this new creation is like the Garden of Eden but even better:

- It's not just the "very good" creation of Genesis 1, but now it is perfect
- Where God is not just present, but we see him face to face
- Where like Adam we are [re-]created in God's image
- Where we are given the job of ruling over God's creation,
- But now the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is replaced by the throne of God, i.e. we're no longer tempted to be our own gods, but rather we joyfully worship Christ as our King
- And now our lives are no longer governed the daily heartbeat of night and day but by the heartbeat of God himself as we live the light of his presence and his love.

This new creation is also where all God's promises are fulfilled – the promises we've been thinking about in recent weeks:

- The "very good" creation of Genesis is now perfect
- Satan is crushed and annihilated by Jesus, a descendant of Adam
- where the spiritual descendants of Abraham from all nations are blessed
- where we are rescued from the slavery of sin into a promised land
- where the son of David reigns on the throne as King
- where we have a glorious eternal future beyond judgement]

So when we are finding it tough to keep on keeping on, to be faithful as followers of Christ, whether it is just the daily grind of continuing to do what we know is right, or because others are making life difficult for us because of our faith, we need to remind ourselves of the glorious future that awaits us – the age of gold. On that day we shall experience a joy which will surpass even that of those Olympic gold medallists; but like them, we will realise that remaining faithful through all the trials and tribulations of this life is a tiny price to pay for the joy that awaits us in heaven.