

As we've journeyed through the book of Revelation, there's been some really tough stuff. Some of it's been really tough because of the nature of Apocalyptic literature – we've been confronted with images and scenes that seem like they'd be quite at home in the plot of a sci-fi book, and yet it's a message from Jesus Christ, about the future.

But then again, some of it's been really tough because of what it bodes – persecution for Christians, consequences for not remaining faithful, and then God's terrible, final judgment upon the **un**righteous... - There's been some really tough stuff...

Something that's made it even tougher, is the book of Revelation (once again, because of its nature), has been open to all sorts of variations of interpretations, some of which have been mixed into 'popular' understandings. And sometimes anything other than these modern popular views, are very quickly branded by some, as being "unbiblical" or even "heretical" ..., and yet **I've** often found, that to be true to the Scriptures, I've had to take a different approach, to what some of the more 'popular' interpretations teach.

And so I've found that I've not only had to preach straight from the Word, but I've also had to research some of these 'popular' ideas, and how they do (or do **not**) fit with God's Word, and then come up with, "Well, how can I explain this, in a way that people will 'get it'?"...

And over the last 8 months, at times you may have found yourself disagreeing with me. And at times, as modern 'popular' notions have been questioned, your eyes may have been opened to see things in a different way, to what you've

ever seen them before (because you've only ever been **exposed** to the more 'popular' views in the past).

For me, this means that over the last 8 months, the time it takes me to prepare a message each week has increased by at **least** a full day. Usually it takes me 2 full days, to read for, prepare, and to write a message. But since we've been in the book of Revelation, that's increased to 3 days, and sometimes a bit longer... Plus time to put together the PowerPoint and go through the message a few times to get it into my head...

Which is a bit of a problem really, when the limited income of Bush Disciples barely cover 3 days a week of ministry in total... (By the way, if you're not already tithing to Bush disciples, I'd encourage you to do so. At our current level of giving, we are going backwards, and at the rate we're going, in 2 or 3 months, we're going to have to cut 3 days of ministry back to 2 or 2.5. So, if you value what we do here at Bush Disciples, I'd encourage you to either begin giving, or increase giving if you can. If everybody was tithing, our little church could support full time ministry.)... ,, Anyway, I've found preaching through Revelation, very rewarding, but very difficult, and very time-consuming. ...

And so this week, as Robyn and I were discussing what I had to fit into my week, she asked me "Is it a difficult message this week?", and I said "No, it's all 'niceness' this week – it's just a picture of heaven coming to earth." – all niceness... And it is all 'niceness', but it didn't end up being either 'easy' or 'quick'.

So, who's up for a bit of niceness????

Last week, I gave the 'heads up' – Rev **20** marks a significant change in the book of revelation... Now in chapter **21**, all the tough stuff's gone. Everything evil, vile and nasty, has gone to hell. And Chapter 21, is the hope that not only us, but every disciple of Jesus (throughout history), have looked forward to.

Let's read Rev 21, in all of its 'niceness'.

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> He 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."

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said,

"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup> And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment. <sup>7</sup> The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup> But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And 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. <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night

there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

How does one describe the indescribable? - I asked that question when we read Rev 4, which describes the very throne-room of Heaven... And it shouldn't be any surprise to us, that we've got the same dilemma again, today... Because now the Throne-room of Heaven has come to Earth, or more precisely, the one who sits on the throne, has come to Earth. The glory and the splendour of the throne-room of Heaven, **is** the glory and splendour of the Lord God Almighty – the Alpha and Omega – the Beginning and the End...

The Throne-room doesn't give **its** glory to God – the **Lord**, gives **His** glory to the Throne-room. And likewise, the glory of Heaven-on-earth, **is** the glory of God – not the glory of some divine 'building program'...

So, when it comes to heaven-on-earth – the divine renovation (if you like), where God makes all things new, how **does** one describe the indescribable?

When it comes to our spatial and physical understanding, **my** only reference point is what I've seen of this Earth... And yet when it comes to glory, and heaven-**on**-earth, I'm pretty sure we're **all** expecting:

- something vastly superior
- something vastly more beautiful
- more delightful

- more spectacular ,

How could we **ever** describe it from the experience we have of our present reality???

I mean, I've seen some jaw-dropping scenes in creation, where I've found myself standing in silent awe and wonder – Places like Yosemite in California; the Rocky Mountains in Canada; the birth of my 2 sons... And yet I expect these will pale into insignificance, compared to the glory of when God makes all things new...

Is that your expectation? I hope it is...

And yet, if you're completely honest, you may have found yourself a little disappointed at the image that we **are** given of heaven-on-earth...

Being the church of “**Bush** Disciples”, I sort-of suspect that you live out here in the bush, because you **like** to live in the bush... If you're anything like me, you **hate** cities... And yet here we have “the New Jerusalem” – the biggest city this earth has ever known, giving us the image of the renewed earth....???

**And** even though we live more than 500km from the beach, don't we love to get away to the coast for a holiday??? And yet we're told this renewed earth has no sea... Does anybody other than me have a little hint of disappointment at that prospect??? Come on 'fess up...

You see, the thing is, we've been discovering that the Book of Revelation is full of images and symbols, that convey a

message... and yet, nearly always, when we get to Chapter 21 and the New Heavens and the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven, we click back over into literal mode again, and we see this massive, shining city as a physical and spatial reality, descending from Heaven – a literal description of what’s going to be our new digs for eternity. But I don’t think it is.

In the past, every time that I’ve read Revelation 21, I’ve tried to picture me, a country boy, living in a massive city, for all eternity.... I’ve known that it’s going to be good – how could something that God has prepared for us **not** be good, but I’ve pictured it as a city-dwelling experience, just the same...

But when I was reading and praying about what to share about this passage, all of a sudden it struck me – “This heavenly city, is a symbol – it’s most probably **not** a literal city – it’s a symbol.” How does one describe the indescribable? You describe it with symbols...

Let me explain:

**v<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

And then in Vs 9&10, this same heavenly city is described as “**the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.**”

Now, is any of that sounding at all, familiar to you? Hasn’t Jesus already got a bride? We’ve already encountered the bride of Christ, haven’t we??? – Who **is** the bride of Christ???? ....??? It’s the church – Christians – the faithful disciples of Jesus, are presented to Christ, pure and holy as



His Bride... And now the city is being described as His bride???

So, if Christians are the bride of Christ, and this heavenly city is the Bride of Christ, what do you think the city represents? It represents the whole, faithful people of God, redeemed throughout the ages... And it tells us more about **our** transformation, and our **place** in God's Kingdom, than what it does about the physical and spatial attributes of our final destination itself...

And when we realise this, any concerns we have about 'city-dwelling', or an ocean-less landscape, are irrelevant, because these things are symbols, and most likely, not physical descriptions at all...

Just as "the church" is not a building, or an institution, or an incorporated organisation – the church are the people of God on earth,,,, It seems to me that this heavenly city – the New Jerusalem, is the people of God, glorified...

And everything about this image:

- is about the glory of God reflected in His glorified, faithful disciples
- it's about the peace and security that His people will experience for all eternity
- it's about the exclusion (or perhaps a better word – the expulsion) of everything impure, profane, and violent
- it's about the place of Jew and Gentile together, as God's holy people

The vision, that “the sea was no more”, doesn’t necessarily tell us there’ll be no sound of surf and no smell of salt in the air... Do you remember what the sea represents? (we talked about it in Chapter 4) Biblically, the sea has been used to represent chaos and evil... And it’s not hard to understand why. *Many a ship has been lost; Many a soul, has cried out to be saved,,,* but there was no one there to save them. The storm and the tempest of a raging ocean, has always been an image of chaos, beyond our ability to overcome...

And in the renewed earth, that’s gone!!!! Evil and chaos – **Gone**... Destruction from physical calamity – **Gone**... *In our news over the last couple of months: Hurricanes; Earthquakes; Floods; Volcanic eruptions...* These natural disasters will increase, right up until the day of judgment, but then they’ll be gone, completely.

And then enters the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

“Behold”, that’s like saying “**Would you look at that!!!**” The dwelling place (Literally: the Tabernacle, tent<sup>i</sup>) 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.

**4 He 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."**

Who's looking forward to that? What a blessing, hey... In all of the troubles and persecutions that Christians have endured throughout history... And with the final onslaught of persecution and executions that will come under Antichrist and his false prophet... And of course, all of the persecutions of the people of God, that have taken place under the rule of Babylon (Godless society), many a tear has been shed – there's been much mourning... The Martyrs have cried out "How long?" ...

But every source of pain, every sorrow and death, are gone – they're relegated to Hell... I do hope you believe there is a "Hell". If you don't, I don't know where you expect your pain and sorrow and suffering and death to go... "Hell" is the place where the source of all suffering and death will be condemned<sup>ii</sup>.

V5: God is making all things new, and then He says, "**Write this down**" – that's like saying "You mark my words, John" – "This is **really** important" ... "**these words are trustworthy and true.**"

"It is done! **I** am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Alright, so God is saying, "The Buck stops with Me.!" It's pointless to question what I'm

about to say – **I** say what goes! So, what **does** God say? What is He being so adamant about? He affirms the contrast between those who will enter this glory, and those who will not. And if you're someone who believes in "Once saved always saved", you're going to have a lot of trouble with this bit, because I'm pretty sure He's talking about those who profess to being Christians... But don't argue with me – this is what the Alpha and the Omega says:

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. <sup>7</sup> The one **who conquers** will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Who **is** the one who conquers? Well, we're told this, right back at the beginning of the book of Revelation, where Jesus dictated 7 letters to churches in what is now modern-day Turkey. He's writing to Christians, and "The one who conquers" are those Christians who remain faithful to Jesus to the end:

- While some will lose their **love** for Jesus and their **love** for other Christians, the one who **conquers**, is the one who repents and loves and loves and loves<sup>iii</sup> .;
- While some will start to mix up their Christianity with idolatry or dabble a bit in the occult or other religions, the one who **conquers** is faithful to Jesus and to Jesus alone<sup>iv</sup>
- While others may be lured into sexual immorality, the one who **conquers**, remains pure.<sup>v</sup>
- While others become 'lukewarm' about their faith, the one who **conquers**, **repents**, and becomes **zealous** for

## God<sup>vi</sup>.

- While others may believe the Gospel, but they're not obedient in their Christian walk, the one who **conquers**, is a person of faith **and** action<sup>vii</sup>.
- While some, who profess to being Christians, ultimately deny Jesus when their life is on the line, the one who **conquers**, is a witness to Christ, even as they are murdered for their faith in Him<sup>viii</sup>.

Alright, the ones who **conquer**, remain faithful to Jesus to the end. They love; they repent when they sin; and they stand firm, as witnesses for Jesus, even if they die as they do so.

But contrasted with this, are those who **don't** overcome – those who are swayed from following Jesus, when the pressure is on. And this is where you're going to have trouble if you're a "Once saved, always saved" devotee.... , because those who don't overcome, **don't** get to go to glory – they end up in Hell (the Lake of Fire and the Second Death).

- There's the Cowardly – To be a disciple of Jesus, we need to be courageous. Cowardice chooses self and safety over Jesus.
- There's the faithless – To be a disciple of Jesus, we not only have faith for salvation, but we **live** by faith. The faithless trust in themselves, and not in God.
- There's the detestable; murderers; sexually immoral; sorcerers; idolaters.. – True disciples of Jesus **repent** of sin – we don't embrace it... The way of Jesus is very

different to the ways of the world. And anyone who wants to claim that it doesn't matter which god we worship, because all gods lead to the one place, ,, Rubbish!... To worship other gods, is detestable to God.

- And the list concludes with “all liars”... It's very tempting to tell a little white lie at times, isn't it. Do you know another name for “a little white lie”? “A dirty great big lie”... A lie, is a lie, is a lie. Disciples of Jesus are a people of truth and righteousness. And even some who profess to being Christians, are outed by their falseness...

The ones who conquer, remain faithful to Jesus to the end. They love; they repent when they sin; and they stand firm, as witnesses for Jesus. They're the ones who have this heritage. All others, have been weeded-out and sent to Hell, along with the rest of the unbelievers.

So, if this Heavenly City represents the whole people of God, what is the symbol telling us?

1. Well firstly, we radiate the glory of God. Everything about this city, radiates the Glory of God. And we will too. Currently, there's not much glorious about me, but we are being changed.

**2 Corinthians 3:17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being

transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

God is already transforming us, but on that day, we will be glorified. You and I, will radiate the glory of God. – now that's a transformation.

2. Secondly, the 12 gates will have the names of the 12 sons of Israel. This tells us that God's faithful, from the **old** covenant, will be entering Glory, through the covenant that they knew. You'll get to meet Moses; Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. David and Ruth and Joshua...
3. Thirdly, the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the 12 names of the Apostles. That means, the testimony of the apostles is our foundation. Why do I teach from the Bible every week? Why do I spend so much of my week preparing to preach from the Bible? Because the testimony of the Apostles, is the foundation of the faith of those, who will be glorified and presented to Christ as His bride. That's why we don't teach a social gospel; we don't teach humanism; or psychology; or philosophy... The testimony of the Apostles, is the foundation of our faith.
4. Fourthly, the city is a cube. 12000 stadia long\*12000 stadia wide\*12000 stadia high. That's 2160km. Imagine a city that stretches from St George to Cape York. And it's that long, and it's that wide, and it's that high (Half that height is considered "outer space").

What's the image that we're being told here? That the

city's huge? Nah... It represents the whole people of God, and lots of them. 1000 means "lots". The number 12 refers to 12 apostles or 12 tribes of Israel, so it refers to the people of God, and lots of them.

I don't think we should picture our residence as being a high-rise apartment in a 2160km cube.

5. Likewise, the wall is 144 cubits.  $12*12$ , representing people of the old covenant **and** the new covenant. But for a city to have a wall, is also an image of safety and security. The people of God, are safe and secure.
6. Then, there's a whole list of 12 precious stones that adorned the foundation of the wall. And the commentaries I read, explained that these stones are the same stones that were set into the High priest's breastplate, each stone representing the 12 tribes of Israel. On the breastplate, they represented the people of God. Here, what do you think they represent? .... The people of God.

Every image here, is pointing to the city representing the whole people of God.

And there's not going to be any need for a temple or any synagogues or church buildings, because we'll be in the very presence of God Himself.

There's no need for a sun or a moon. We won't need street lights or a light on our phone, because God is light, and the



pure light of His glorious presence, will make everything bright.

Some Godly kings will be there (isn't it good to hear, that at least some rulers are Godly, and they'll be there), as will the nations (that's us) – **All** the disciples of Jesus, from all over the world, will be there. Nobody's going to be left out. The gates will never be shut – that means there will be no danger, lurking to destroy, because everything evil has already been dealt with, and sent to Hell.

In glory, there will never be anything detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

**Chapter 22** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Life, comes from God through Jesus Christ. All of what we've seen here, are symbols... I'm actually none-the-wiser as to what the renewed earth will actually look like. Will there be seas and oceans in the geography of the renewed earth??? I don't know. We're not given a geographical description – It's a symbolic description.

But I **do** know this:

- **All** God's faithful children will be there
- We will be **safe**
- We will be **healed**
- We will be **provided** for
- We will be **loved**
- We, along with creation, we will be transformed, to radiate the glory of God.
- There will be no sickness
- There will be no death
- There will be no evil or pain
- There won't be anything accursed.
- And none of this will be temporary – this will be our home; our inheritance; and our blessing, forever and ever and ever.

If I had to guess, I reckon it'd be much more like the Garden of Eden than our world today, Except Satan won't be there.

No matter what the renewed Earth will be, we trust God, and we look forward to the surprise.

Questions?

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<sup>i</sup> σκηνή G5008 (*skēnē*), tent, tabernacle, dwelling;

Harris, M.J. et al., 1986. Tent, Tabernacle L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

<sup>ii</sup> 20:14

<sup>iii</sup> Rev 2:1-7

<sup>iv</sup> Rev 2:12-29

<sup>v</sup> Rev 2:12-29

<sup>vi</sup> Rev 3:14-22

<sup>vii</sup> Rev 3:1-6

<sup>viii</sup> Rev 2:8-11 & 3:7-13