

What will our eternal home be like?

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[0 : 0 0] keep your bibles open to revelation 21 and 22 i'm going to move a little quicker than usual today so that's why it's pretty important to keep it open in front of you we probably won't dwell in verses for as long as we normally do and i sometimes i will not even read out the verses i'll just refer to them as we go along so it'll be good if you can have that in front of you let's pray father as we come again lord we just pray for your holy spirit to be opening our eyes again to this vision that you have given the apostle john a lot we know that no preacher on this earth can really do justice to explaining what the future really holds for us but lord i just pray that you would help me to do my best and indeed you would indeed give us much clarity and much confidence again as you have done the last three weeks to just put our trust in you and put our hope in you in what you have done and in what you will do for your people all this we pray in the name of jesus christ amen now poor airlines it's been a tough year for them hasn't it with most people unable to travel airlines are increasingly desperate and so quite a number of them have begun offerings offering flights to nowhere that's when you get on a plane you fly around in the sky for a while and then you land back at the exact same airport that you took off from so quantas for example gives you a chance to fly close to some of australia's most famous landmarks the great barrier reef the sydney harbour uh eva air from taiwan will take you on a night time loop around the island while feeding you moon cakes and ensuring that you get the best possible view of the full moon since their promotion coincides with the recent mid-autumn festival and if you're someone who's been stuck at home for six months and you're desperate for a change in scenery i suppose there's a certain appeal to it quantas claim that they were sold out within 10 minutes but i suspect that for most of us if we decide to go on a long journey we would like to think that we are actually going somewhere just imagine you've worked hard and so now you really want that holiday and so you take off from coaching international airport on a 12-hour flight remember we're just imagining and then when the pilot announces that you will be landing shortly you peek out of the window and what do you see the civic center waterfront wisma sabakas now i'm very proud of our city but after 12 hours on the plane i imagine you want to look out at see the eiffel tower or something not the dbku building you won't be hoping that you'll be right back where you started especially after you had to pack like crazy and battle through customs and security you want to know that you're heading somewhere good well today god wants to make it clear that we're not on a flight to nowhere we're heading somewhere we've got a destination after all over the past four weeks we've been on a journey this journey begins the moment we are born and as we saw in week one of our current series we have one shot at life people are destined to die only once and then to face judgment but as we saw in week two before that happens at the moment of death all believers get to go to be with christ in what we call the intermediate state we are away from the body but with jesus and that's

something good something to be happy about but even that is not the great hope of the christian it's just a transit point rather week three we saw that our great hope is to be raised again with christ with our resurrected glorious bodies that are just like his and when that happens that's when we can get excited because that means we're arriving at our destination uh sure we will have to face the judge but in christ the believer need not worry that he won't be let in through immigration the judge himself has issued our visa we will arrive but what is our destination well that's what we're considering today in revelation 21 and 22 the apostle john is given a great vision and this vision is a bit like one of those glossy brochures that you might get when you're looking for a new house because that's where we're going we're going to live in a new home and the revelation 21 to 22 brochure is going to show you all the amazing features of your new new residence all its highlights its beauty its splendor its splendor its grace it's a vision designed to get us dreaming but the most incredible thing is that this dream will come true in christ you are already holding the keys this is our final destination and so what will our eternal home be like well this morning we'll look at four of its features i will do so mainly from this vision occasionally we'll jump to other parts of the bible but mainly from revelation 21 and 22 and let me just say that from the outset that when we read these two chapters we need to remember that we are often dealing with highly figurative language not literal language just something to keep in mind otherwise we are going to get confused and so come with me and let's take a tour and the first thing to say is that our eternal home is not a relocation but a transformation now if we were to survey the christian population at large i suspect that many will think heaven will be home that's where we are relocating and by heaven we usually mean someplace up there that's kind of cloudy probably pretty shiny a celestial city where hillsong music is on permanently but is that right you'll notice that in 21 verse 1 what is advertised is pretty different john sees a new heaven and a new earth hmm that sounds kind of strange what's the earth doing there and why does heaven need an upgrade maybe this real estate agent is trying to scam me to solve this mystery let's examine how the word heaven is used in scripture it's used primarily in one of three ways firstly it could simply refer to the sky it's where the birds live and the rain comes from it comes from heaven in other words the expanse above us other space secondly it could refer to what we now call outer space and so think of abraham's descendants

whom the bible says are as numerous as the stars in heaven and then thirdly heaven can refer to where god is now that isn't necessarily talking about a specific location in this universe There's a story, I think it's just an urban legend, that the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin, upon his first trip up into space, commented, I don't see God up here.

But in the Bible, heaven isn't so much a specific dwelling place in this universe, but more of where God's presence, God's reign, God's will is manifested perfectly and directly.

It's a different dimension of reality. And that's why sometimes heaven is used almost as a stand-in for God himself.

[9 : 20] Such as when the younger son, in that parable of Luke 15, cries upon returning to his father, he says, I have sinned against heaven. He means I have sinned against God.

And so when the Bible uses the expression, the heavens and the earth, like in Genesis 1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, it's probably speaking more in the first and the second sense, rather than the third sense.

It's a poetic way of talking about the entire universe, the whole cosmos. And so, when we come to the end of the Bible, and John sees a new heaven, and a new earth, what he's really seeing is a brand new universe.

Isaiah 65 speaks of the same thing. And according to Isaiah, this new universe is filled with buildings, and vineyards, and animals, and fruitful labor.

It's concrete. It's tangible. It's physical. It certainly doesn't sound like it's just filled with fluffy clouds, and angels carrying harps.

[10 : 38] And guess what? In Matthew 5 verse 5, Jesus says, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Which earth? Well, this earth. This is our eternal home. This new earth. In this brand new universe.

Not the heaven of our popular imagination. But in what sense are the new heavens and the new earth new?

Is God going to throw away the old heavens and the old earth into the bin? Burn it all up and start from scratch? It sure can sound that way. Just look at 2 Peter 3 verse 10, for instance, on the screen.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a rock. The elements will be destroyed by fire. And the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

[11 : 48] But a closer look at the context suggests otherwise. Earlier in 2 Peter 3, Peter draws a parallel between what will happen to the earth and what happened during Noah's time.

In the days of Noah, God judged the earth not so much by totally annihilating it and recreating everything from scratch, but by cleansing and renewing it through the flood.

And just as he did so by water, he will now do so by fire. For just as fire can be used to melt away all the impurities, to produce the highest grade of gold or silver, so God now uses the fire that refines to produce a universe that can be said to be of the highest quality.

You might remember from last week that our bodies which are resurrected and transformed are the same bodies we die with.

And it's the same with the entire universe. As someone once said, God is not making all new things.

[13 : 17] He is making all things new. And so unlike the Buddhists, we don't say our eternal home is Nirvana, where all desire is extinguished and physical matter doesn't matter.

Unlike the Hindu, we don't say that our ultimate home is Moksha, which is the escape of the soul from being reborn into the physical world. As Christians, we say that our eternal home is the new heavens and the new earth.

It's right here, only better. It's the universe version 2.0, if you like. There's been regeneration, a word Jesus uses in Matthew 19, verse 28 to describe what's going on here.

I think the special effects just highlight that as well. There's been transformation. And that should excite us.

Now think of it this way. I wonder if you've ever had this experience. As a young kid, you would go somewhere which you thought was the best place ever.

[14 : 35] You know, you're convinced that there's nothing like it and you have many happy memories there. But after many years, you go back to that same place and you find it disappointing.

Everything isn't as good as you remembered it, whether that's the food or the scenery or the music or the music. And perhaps you blame it on standards going down or something.

But deep down in your heart, you know it's simply because you've grown up. You're no longer a child. But the new heavens and the new earth won't be like that.

In fact, it will be the exact opposite. When we get there, there's a sense of familiarity as if we were there in our childhood.

It's a place we kind of know. But instead of disappointment, we'll also be overcome with a sense of wonder because it's even better than we imagine.

[15 : 38] It's been transformed into something far more breathtaking. To use a phrase that travel writers love to use, it has become heaven on earth.

We don't go up there, but the heavenly city comes down here as in verse 2. And God himself, verse 3, comes down to dwell with his people.

There is no need to relocate because God will transform our universe. And it will be heaven on earth because our eternal home will be marked by an absence of adversaries and affliction.

That's the second feature I want us to notice today. One of the interesting things about Revelation 21 and 22 is how John doesn't just describe what is there, but also what isn't there.

And I'm sure the first thing that you notice in verse 1 is that there's no longer any sea. Now, that might disappoint some of you. Doesn't sound like paradise after all, does it?

[16 : 53] I quite like the beach myself. I'm hoping to head there this week. But remember, Revelation uses a lot of symbolic language. After all, this is a book that describes Jesus as spitting a sword out of his mouth and as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes.

And so, John doesn't mean that there'll be no literal sea. Whew, I hear some of you say. But what does he mean, though? Well, we must remember that the Israelites are not a seafaring people.

And to them, the sea represents a place of chaos, of unrest, of turmoil. Just think of all those waves crashing through and through.

And indeed, earlier in the book of Revelation, it is the place where the beast comes from and it is a place of death.

But now, there is no longer any sea. In the new heavens and the new earth, there will only be calm.

[18 : 07] There will only be rest. There will only be tranquility. That sweet spot where you don't feel swamp or overwhelmed or out of control.

And verse 4, there won't be any tears either. No sea here means no death.

And no death means no more weeping. Think of the features of our current world. Think of couples fighting, children grieving, the lonely aching, the destitute suffering.

And so whether you're young or old, rich or poor, tears are a common feature. But one day, just as a parent loves to reach down, to wipe away the tears of their children, and so our Heavenly Father will do the same.

When we hear that the first heavens and the first earth will pass away, what God is really saying is that our present experience will pass away.

[19 : 27] It will no longer be part of the old order of things. You know, when we look around, it can sometimes seem as if we're locked in a perpetual cycle of destruction.

A century ago, we had a pandemic. Now we're having a pandemic again. Every few years, a ceasefire somewhere is broken, and a new war breaks out.

Every unhappy relationship in every generation boils down to the same angry words and the same broken promises. But God says we are not locked into this cycle forever.

With a new home comes a new order of things. And our eternal home will be a place of total safety.

For the majority of chapter 21, we're given a description of the new Jerusalem. Now we're not meant to take this description too literally, that will become clearer later, but see it as another poetic way from which to view our home.

[20 : 39] And just look at verse 12. We're told that this city has a great and high wall made with all sorts of precious stones from verse 18 onwards. And these walls represent safety.

The city walls of the old Jerusalem were designed to keep out enemies. Fortification endures salvation, as in Isaiah 26 verse 1 and 2.

Security is guaranteed. But perhaps the clearest indication that this place is completely safe comes in verse 25.

On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. Now just think about it. Why do people pay to live in gated communities?

Why do they have a guard and road barriers and even patrols? Well, it's to keep any external threats out. It's to keep away the gangsters and the robbers and the kidnappers who come with evil intent.

[21 : 52] But in our eternal home, this gated community paradoxically will find its gates and indeed its walls redundant.

The gate need never to be shut for evil will be no more. And that's why there is no more night because in both ancient and modern times, the night is associated with unsavoury activity.

But no night equals no threats and no threats equals open gates. Indeed, it must remain open so that it will receive from every tribe and tongue and nation the praises of the Lord, the lips that give glory to his name.

Look at verse 26. The glory and the honour of the nations will be brought into it. Our eternal home is a place of total safety for it will be made holy.

Verse 27. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful and deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

[23 : 16] life. Well, that brings us to the third feature of our eternal home. Thirdly, our eternal home will be populated by a purified and perfected people.

You know, as we've been reading those verses in verse 26 and 27, I hope one thing stands out to you. Our eternal home is social.

It's not just about you and God. It's a picture of diverse community. Now, God has always planned that people will live in loving community, just as God himself as the Trinity lives in loving community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Self-isolation was never the name of the game. And that's why, all the way back in Genesis 1 and 2, in Eden, humanity's original home, we already find a community.

It is not good for man to be alone, God declares, and so he makes Adam and Eve to be a partnership together, serving him faithfully as the first human community.

[24 : 34] But the problem of course is that that home didn't last long, because humankind chose to disregard their landlord, and so that community became fractured as Adam and Eve hid from God, blamed each other, and ultimately banished from Eden.

Adam and Eve were meant to work and take care of the garden. Now, that's priestly language, since the Old Testament priests were meant to do exactly the same thing with the temple to work it and take care of it.

But now that they are defiled, all descendants of Adam are no longer fit to be these kind of priests. We have no access to the tree of life.

We have no ability any longer to make our world flourish. And that has been our state ever since. But look now at the picture of our eternal home.

In Revelation 22 verses 1 to 3, what flows through this city? It is the river of the water of life. It is a picture of God restoring the fullness of life into this world as it flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

[25 : 56] It is a picture taken not just from Genesis 2, but also Ezekiel 47 verse 8 and 9. where a river flows from the throne of God into the dead sea and subsequently brings life where there is death.

And then notice on each side of the river stands the tree of life once more bringing healing to the nations.

Notice once again it's not just individualistic. Now what sort of healing are we talking about? Well verse 3 tells us no longer will there be any curse.

And the reason for that is because of the lamb. He's ever present in our eternal home as he should be.

He's right there in 21 verse 9 and 14 and 22 and 23 and so on. The river and the tree of life brings back memories of Eden.

[27 : 05] But the key difference between Eden and our eternal home is the prominence of the lamb. Notice that in 22 verse 4 that all those in the new heavens and the new earth will have his name stamped on their foreheads.

In the Old Testament it was only the high priest who had God's name written on his forehead. But now all those who live in the new creation have been cleansed by the blood of the lamb.

All are now fit to be priests having been purified. And so our eternal home is all about the purification and perfection of a people.

In fact when we look a little closer we realize that the new Jerusalem is identified more as a people than a place. Let me explain. Back in Revelation 19 verse 7 to 8 we're told that the bride is getting ready for her wedding and it's clear that the bride is God's holy people.

And now in Revelation 21 verses 9 and 10 the bride and the city are considered the same thing. Did you notice how the angel says he will show us the bride but he shows us the city instead?

[28 : 32] And that's because the new Jerusalem isn't so much a place but a people. The city and the bride are two different pictures of the same reality.

And if nothing impure will ever enter the city that's because nothing impure will ever be found among God's people.

That list you see in verse 8 the cowardly the unbelieving the vow and so on will have no place in our eternal home.

In the new order of things there will be no such thing as hatred no such thing as selfishness no such thing as lust and covetousness.

You see why are there tears now? Precisely because of those things. But in our eternal home there will be no more tears for there will be no more impurities.

[29 : 39] again just imagine what would it be like to never ever hate or be resentful of someone ever again?

What would it be like never to feel pangs of unrighteous jealousy or have a desire to justify yourself in front of everyone? It will all be absent.

Or more positively what would it be like to truly love God with all your heart and mind and strength and soul?

What would it look like to truly love your neighbour as yourself? That will be what's present. Why?

Because this city or people is built on apostolic teaching whose chief subject is the gospel. And that's why verse 14 we are told that the foundations of the city are the twelve apostles of the lamb.

[30 : 46] The gospel they proclaim is what brings about the purification and perfection of God's people. And what are God's people all about?

Well that brings us to our fourth feature. Our eternal home is all about relationship and worship. You might have been puzzled by some of the descriptions of the city.

For example, in 21 verses 15 to 17 we get all these measurements. And if we think of it literally, the architects in the room will tell you that it's a little bit weird. The walls seem out of proportion to the height of the city for instance.

But zoom out and we realise that the city is in the shape of a perfect cube. Now that's another big clue. It's symbolic. For in the Old Testament there is only one place where we get a perfect cube.

The holy of holies in the temple. The most intimate dwelling place of God. The place where the priest alone meets with God. But now the New Jerusalem is described as a perfect cube.

[32 : 03] Because the entire new heavens and the new earth is charged with the presence of God. And that's why there is no need for any more temple in 21 verse 22.

The outer cords, the curtains, all those barriers, all totally unnecessary. And everyone can meet with God. For as God declares in verse 3, God will be our God and we will be his people.

It's a declaration that rings again and again throughout the Bible in Exodus and Leviticus and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You know, we find those words. But this is the declaration of declarations.

We will be his people in a way we have never been before. Because now our relationship with him is totally perfect. No sin will ever get in its way any longer.

What will we do in the new heavens and the new earth? That's a question often asked. And the answer is in 22 verse 3. We will serve him.

[33 : 23] We will worship him. That word translated serve in the NIV can also be translated as worship. Now that might not sound appealing if we think of worship as only singing.

And even music lovers won't be keen on singing 24 7. But what if we understand worship as any activity that brings glory to God?

In the new creation there will be work to do. Now that is hinted at in the parable of the ten minas that Jesus tells in Luke 19.

There those who have been deemed faithful in managing the master's money are given more responsibilities including management of cities. Now whether those are literal cities or not might be up for debate but clearly we will still work in some sense.

But this is joyful work. pleasurable work restful work worshipful work. You know how when you are completely absorbed in something you enjoy time passes all too quickly?

[34 : 36] Now that's a foretaste of what's to come. Our eternal home will not be like being locked down in our houses where we are inactive lethargic and bored.

We will be active and energetic. Now what else will we do? I'll try not to venture into speculation but I suspect there will be plenty of beauty to enjoy in the new creation.

Look at how the city is adorned. God made the original Eden beautiful and he has made the new city beautiful as well. We remain physical creatures.

Remember we have our resurrection bodies and so there's no reason why physical activities like sports or hiking or whatever wouldn't be off limits. There will be rich social interaction.

Human marriage might come to an end but not rich times of fellowship and friendship. And ultimately the most important thing is that we will enjoy God forever.

[35 : 44] Revelation 22 verse 4 tells us that we will see his face. This is actually the most important thing. Martin Luther once said, I would rather be in hell with Christ than in heaven without him.

Now he is deliberately exaggerating of course but his point is Jesus is the point of heaven. If Jesus is not there our eternal home cannot be home.

For the believer it is impossible to long for the new heavens and the new earth without longing for Christ. And indeed if we have no longing for Christ himself then we need to seriously ask ourselves whether we are even Christians.

For when we see Jesus as he is our joy will know no end. It will truly be heaven on earth not just in the first or second sense but in the third sense because we will be where God is.

And this is what our eternal home will be like. What happens when you die? We said a couple of weeks ago that it's like going home and today we can say more.

[37 : 04] It is like going to this sort of home. Does that fill you with excitement? does that fill you with anticipation?

This is our destination. This is where you're heading to. But only if you drink from the well spring of Jesus.

Look at 21 verse 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.

This vision is wonderful. But if you're not someone who trusts in Jesus today, then this vision is not your destination. It's simply an unattainable picture on a brochure.

You see, all human beings deep down know that this present world is not our home. And whether we realise it or not, we're homesick. And so we go looking for home.

[38 : 18] We look for it in our work or in our relationships or our family or our hobbies or our dream home here on earth or perhaps even in religion.

But none of that will satisfy forever. All of that will leave you ultimately empty. but Jesus says, I can offer the water that satisfies.

I can offer the water of life and it will be without cost to you. Why? Because I have paid the cost.

I'm the lamb, remember? I'm the one who died on the cross and rose again to give you all this. All you have to do is drink.

But to do so, you must know that you're thirsty in the first place. And you can't order any drink you like. You must accept the water that comes from Jesus alone.

[39 : 21] But even as Christians, we must keep drinking. And the way we drink is by not forgetting. That's what we must do. Don't forget.

But in this case, the call isn't not to forget the past. The call is not to forget our future. The preacher Tim Keller illustrates it this way.

He imagines two men, prisoners of war, let's say, being thrown into a dungeon. Their sentence is for 10 years or so. And the first man is told that his wife and children are dead.

And so by the time he gets to year two, his spirits are flagging. He just can't go on. And so he withers away and he doesn't make it. But the second man discovers that his wife and children are still alive.

And so he perseveres. Day after day he endures the hard labour, the difficulty, the tears, because he knows that when he gets out, his family will be there waiting for him.

[40 : 28] What is Keller's point? he's saying that human beings are creatures who are shaped by hope. That's just who we are. The way we live now is completely shaped by what we believe about the future.

And that is exactly why John wrote Revelation. His first readers were Christians living during a time when they needed encouragement to remain faithful to Christ as they faced persecution from the Roman Empire and seduction from the surrounding pagan culture.

And whenever they were tempted to give up, Revelation 21 to 22 would remind them, we have a city to look forward to. We belong here. We can stay on the path.

And so we too must never forget. To go back to Keller's illustration, imagine that the second man has a photo of his family. He would have hung it prominently somewhere, wouldn't he?

He would have looked at it every day. And that's what we must do. We must keep our focus on our eternal home.

[41 : 41] We must daily set our minds on things above, as Colossians 3 puts it. But could that result in us being too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good, as some people have sometimes accused Christians of?

The objection here is that if we're constantly thinking about the streets of gold, then we wouldn't bother to fix all those potholes on the road to Kapit or somewhere. But think of it this way.

Roads that actually lead somewhere will be better maintained than roads that go nowhere. That's just human psychology. And if death is not the end, but our road actually brings us into the presence of God himself, who would want to know how our journey went, then would not the pilgrim who has an eye on his destination live more purposefully than the tourist who is simply looking to maximize his own pleasure?

As C.S. Lewis once observed, if you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for this present world were those who taught most of the next.

So don't forget. And get the picture right. Get what the Bible actually teaches about our eternal home right.

[43 : 09] That's what I've been trying to do for you this morning. The late science fiction writer Isaac Asimov once said that he didn't believe in an afterlife. And so he wouldn't waste any time not just fearing hell, but fearing heaven.

Why did he say that? It's a weird statement, isn't it? Well, he said, whatever the tortures of hell, the bottom of heaven would be worse. And who can blame him if we think that our final reward is simply to relocate to an eternal home where we just float around fiddling with halves all day?

How can we fix our eyes on eternity if the destination sounds so unappealing? But if we get heaven right, or better, we get our language right and talk about the new heavens and the new earth, well, how much more motivation we will have?

And so as we come to the end of our series today, well, that's what we need to keep doing. one day, we will die. And when we do, we won't be on a flight to nowhere.

And wonderfully, all those in Christ will be heading to this eternal home. And eternity will not be a burden. And that's the assurance we can have.

[44 : 38] But right now, we are not dead. And so let's prepare to die well and make the most of the day. In the immortal words of City Start, whom I've quoted before, only one life, it will soon be passed.

Only one life, only what's done for Christ will last. Let's pray. Father, as we come to you, we are awed once again by this vision of the new heavens and the new earth.

And we pray, Lord, that this will be something that will be on our minds each and every day. We pray, Lord, that you'll indeed help us to set our minds on things above and not just on things below, to recognize that this is the future that you have prepared for us.

And with that, encourage us to keep living for you wholeheartedly today, to live as ambassadors of the new Jerusalem, as people who are pilgrims on our way there.

And so I comment, each and every person in our congregation and everyone who's listening today, I pray indeed that they would know this, that they would drink from the water of life, and they will rejoice in you and your son, the lamb of God.

[46 : 06] Let's pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.