

Revelation 21:1-8 “The Dwelling Place of God Is with Man”
Isaiah 51:1-16
Psalm 84

January 19, 2020

Think about what Isaiah is saying!

“look to the rock from which you were hewn...

Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you...”

Isaiah is speaking to the exiles.

And he is saying, remember God’s promises to Abraham!

“he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.”

The LORD comforts Zion – he makes her wilderness like Eden –
her desert like the garden of the LORD

In the exile, God turned the Promised Land into a desert – a wasteland.

But now he promises that he will restore Zion –
he will make the desert into a garden – like Eden!

Already in the first three verses we have Abraham and Eden!

Then in verse 4, we hear about *torah* – a law will go out from me...

Justice – righteousness – salvation – all Exodus language!

And then in verse 6 we have eschatological language:

“the heavens vanish like smoke – the earth will wear out like a garment”
and judgment will come!

As in the days of Moses – when God made the depths of the sea
a way for the redeemed to pass over”

And all this will come to pass when the LORD redeems his people and restores his holy Zion.
Everlasting joy will be upon their heads – and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!

And all of this is summed up in verse 16 –

“establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth,
and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”

This message of God’s *presence* with his people is at the heart of Isaiah’s preaching.

It goes all the way back to Isaiah 7 –

the sign of “Immanuel” – God with us.

The dwelling place of God is with man!

And when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
the promise of Isaiah began to be fulfilled.

I've been making the case all through this series in Revelation
that the book of Revelation must be understood in the light of the OT –
and especially as the NT counterpart to the whole of the prophetic literature.
The prophets were talking to the people of God about what it means to be *his people*
in the midst of exile.

Now that Jesus has come, there is a sense in which the exile is over!
After all, the King has come!!
And yet... we still *feel* very much in exile.
The heavenly city seems so far away!
The presence of God is *not* very visible!

We walk by *faith* – not by sight.

Today we are looking at the promise that the dwelling of God will be with man!
In chapter 65 of Isaiah – in verse 17, the LORD says this:
“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.”

God promises a day when he will make all things right.
A day when there will be no more weeping – no more sorrow.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 84B.
Psalm 84 is a prayer of the sons of Korah –
a prayer of longing for the presence of God –
a prayer of longing to be in *his house*.
There is a great line in the middle of the Psalm –
“Blessed is the man whose strength is in you –
in whose heart are the highways.”

The ESV renders it well: in whose heart are the highways to Zion –
the Trinity Psalter Hymnal does equally well:
“who has a pilgrim’s mind.”

The point is that our *hearts* – our *minds* – must be set on the heavenly Zion.

And our chief thought must always be – *that is where I belong!!*
I am a pilgrim... a sojourner here.

Sing Psalm 84 (TPH 84B)

Read Revelation 20:11-21:8

There she is!

Finally!

We've been hearing about the Bride!

We heard in chapter 19 that the Wedding Supper was *coming*.

Now – here she comes!

Radiant – beautiful – adorned for her husband!

Your beauty is not for yourself!

It is for Another!

Your beauty is for Jesus!

In marriage we are given a picture of that.

Your beauty is not for every guy to gawk at.

Your beauty is for your husband.

Over the years I have begun to learn to discipline myself toward that.

Beauty is a good thing – made by God!

But a woman's beauty – or a man's beauty, for that matter! –
is not *mine*.

And I may not treat it as mine!

It belongs to Jesus.

For a time – for the rest of my life – Ginger's beauty has been loaned to me –
but even still, she is not *mine*.

She belongs to *him* – and I must be prepared to present her to him...

Indeed, Paul says that as a minister of the gospel

I must make it my calling to present everyone mature in Christ (Col 1:28),

even as Christ himself will present the church to himself in splendor

as a spotless bride! (Eph 5:27)

Well, here we are!

Or to say it another way – there she is!

Because *we* are the ones that John sees as he sees the heavenly Jerusalem
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband!

1. The Seventh (and Eighth) “And I Saw” – the New Heaven – the New Jerusalem (v1-2)

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.

Whereas in chapter 20, we saw cosmic judgment and destruction,
now we see that after cosmic dissolution comes a new creation!

The first heaven and the first earth had passed away – and the sea was no more.
Having yielded up its dead, the sea has no purpose anymore!

From the Flood – to the crossing of the Red Sea – to the prophets and the Psalms –
the Sea had always been a picture of the forces of chaos and destruction –
a powerful chaotic force untameable by human hands.

But with the coming of Christ as Judge –
with the final judgment having been proclaimed at the end of chapter 20,
the first heavens and the first earth pass away –
and the sea is no more.

Some people have said that the new heavens and the new earth
are simply *this creation* glorified and perfected.

There may be a measure of truth to that –
but ask any physicist –
“this creation” *cannot* last forever.
The day will come when our sun burns out –
and long before then, this planet will have become uninhabitable!!

Certainly God could change the laws of physics!
But if God changes the laws of physics,
then it is *not* really *this earth* any more!

The point of the vision – the point of the picture –
is summed up well by the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:10-13 –
“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,
and then the heavens will pass away with a roar,
and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved,
and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,
what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,
waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,
because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved,
and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth
in which righteousness dwells.”

Peter’s statement and John’s vision connect very easily and clearly.

There a number of different ways this is said in the scriptures –
but whether it speaks of the heavens being “rolled up like a scroll” –
or “set on fire and dissolved” –
the point is that the *old* will be done away –
and a *new heavens* and a *new earth* will begin.

C. S. Lewis is one of the few authors who has provided a clear picture of what this might be.
His way of describing the “new” Narnia as being recognizable – and yet *far better*
is a good way of putting it.
He describes the *destruction* of the Narnia that was –
and yet, the *new* takes up the best features of the old
into something still more glorious!

And that’s the way that John speaks in verse 2:

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

This is the eighth “and I saw” –
but so amazing is the sight, that John’s word order gets mixed up!!

Every other “and I saw” comes first.
Here, the vision interrupts the grammar!
“and the holy city, New Jerusalem, I saw!”

(It’s perfectly good Greek – but very different from the way John has been talking!)

What does John see?
The holy city – new Jerusalem!
Jerusalem is recognizable – as *Jerusalem* –
and yet, far more glorious – far more beautiful –
Jerusalem as she should have been!

How should we talk about the new creation?
What do we know about the new creation?
There is *one* place where the new creation has already begun!

In the resurrection of Jesus!
In the resurrection of Jesus, the new creation has begun.
If you want to see what the new creation looks like –
look at Jesus!

In the resurrection of Jesus,
his physical body was raised from the dead.

And in his ascension to the right hand of the Father,
he was transformed with a glorious body.

Even now, we *begin* to participate in this:

That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 –

“if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

But at the same time, while we have been united to Christ *by faith* –
our bodies have *not yet* been transformed!

We participate in the new creation now *by faith* – not yet by sight.

But John sees in his vision *that day*.

John sees what we *shall be!*

He sees *you* – he sees *me* – he sees the holy city – the heavenly Jerusalem –
he sees the Bride coming to her wedding day!

And after all these “and I saw, and I saw, and I saw” –

John then says, “And I heard...”

2. What John Heard: “The Dwelling Place of God Is with Man” (v3-4)

³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place^[a] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,^[b] and God himself will be with them as their God.^[c] 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.”*

All the powers – all the forces – that were hostile to humanity will be gone!

Why?

How?

Because the dwelling place of God is with man.

The “tabernacle” of God is with man.

This started in the incarnation – when the word became flesh
and tabernacled among us – he dwelt among us!

It all goes back to the creation of Eve!

Genesis 2 uses construction language:

God *built* Eve from the *side* of Adam.

It's the same language as when Solomon *built* the temple with *sides*.

The bride is the temple – the temple is the bride.

God dwelling with his people –

the intimacy of that relationship cannot be overstated!

(After all, as we saw in Revelation 12,

our heavenly mother – the Jerusalem above – has had lots of children!)

But when God is *present* – then his blessing comes to his people.

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.*”

When you are in the middle of the pain and suffering – there is no reason – no explanation – that will satisfy.

And John does not say that in the new creation, “the reason for all suffering will become clear.”

No – he says instead that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Death shall be no more.

There will be no mourning – nor crying – nor pain anymore –

for the former things have passed away.

All the causes of misery will be removed.

God himself will be *with us*.

3. What God Says to You (v5-8)

In verses 5-8, the Triune God speaks to *you*.

He starts with what he himself will do:

a. “I Am... I Will...” God Himself Will Do It (v5-6)

⁵ *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.”

John has been writing down many things that God says.

But there are a few places where John is given particular instruction to *write this down*.

Sure – all of John’s record is trustworthy and true!

But this is a way of highlighting certain particular points –

For instance, here:

⁶ *And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*

On the cross, the Lord Jesus said, “It is finished” –

referring to his atoning work on the cross.

Now, in John’s vision of the end of history, he hears the Lord Jesus say,

“It is done! I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.”

The “it is finished” of the cross and the “it is done” of the apocalypse

are forever bound together!

He who began a good in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus!

The first thing that God tells you in this passage
is that *he* is the one who will bring all this to pass.

Only God can save!

And that leads into the next line:

b. To the Thirsty – to the One Who Conquers – I Will Be Their Inheritance (v6-7)

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

Are you thirsty?

Are you longing for streams of living water?

Are you dry and weary – longing for refreshment?

Jesus offers you the water of life *without payment* –

The gospel comes freely.

There are no prerequisites!

There are no preconditions!

Some might say, “Oh, but you have to turn away from sin in order to come to Jesus!”

But do you have to turn away from sin *in order* to come to Jesus?

If so, then Paul had a funny way of showing it in Ephesus.

In that city there were many who came to faith in Jesus –

and *only later*, as they were learning how to follow Jesus,
did they burn their books of sorcery!

You don’t have to stop sinning *in order* to believe!

No – you have to come to Jesus, trusting that *he* is what you need –

and that *he* will take care of you –

and that *he* will lead you in good paths – paths of righteousness –
paths of life and holiness and truth.

That’s why verse 7 says:

⁷ *The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*

Jesus conquered – and he received the inheritance from his Father.

And so those who are united to Jesus by faith will also conquer –
and thus, will also have this inheritance.

As Athanasius put it –

“God became man, so that man might become God.”

He became all that we are – by nature –

so that we might become all that he is – by grace!

Humanity was supposed to be the son of God.

Adam was created to reflect his heavenly Father.

Abraham was told to leave his father's house – and his father's inheritance –
and God promised him an inheritance that only *God* could give.

Israel was called the firstborn son of God –

and when Israel failed, God spoke of the son of David –
that I will be his father, and he shall be my son!

If you think about it – the whole story of humanity kept narrowing –
from Adam to Abraham to Israel to David – and finally to Jesus...
but in Jesus, the promise moves back out to all humanity!

At least – all humanity that is willing to be saved!

God does not turn away any who come to him in faith!

But at the same time, he does not force anyone to believe.

And in the same way that faith invariably bears fruit in deeds –
so also lack of faith bears fruit in deeds.

c. But for the Cowardly – for the Rebellious – Their Portion Will Be the Lake of Fire (v8)

⁸ 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 sulfur, which is the second death.

John has an interesting list of eight types of people – all connected by the word “and.”

In English we wind up using different ways of saying it –
but in Greek, it's all the same pattern:

The *cowardly* – what does he mean?

It's the term Jesus used of the disciples, when they were afraid of the sea.

Jesus then rebuked the sea – and the waves became still.

John now uses that term to say,

“If you persist in your fearfulness –
and thus you refuse to believe the gospel” –
then your portion will be the lake of fire.

It's an interesting place to start!

Because it contrasts pointedly with “the one who conquers.”

This list is not just a list of “those heathens out there!!”

This list *starts* with “those who say that they are Christians,
but who are cowards – and turn back, refusing to hold fast to Christ”

The faithless.

Jesus used the same word of the disciples in the episode of the calming of the sea:
“O you of little faith!”
If we refuse to believe in the one who stilled the sea –
then we are saying that we do not want to be with him
at the final day!

The detestable (which comes from a root that means “to stink.”)
It means to be abominable – abhorrent – detestable.
It is closely connected with the following people:
murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, and idolaters.
Those who willfully disobey God’s commands.
The term translated “sorcerer” probably needs a new translation in our day –
since few people today would claim to be “sorcerers”!
“Pharmakois” refers to those who concoct potions.
It’s where we get our word “pharmacist” from.
But in the Greek world, a pharmakeus can either be *good* or *bad*
depending on what he is doing with his potions!

I’m somewhat sympathetic to those who want to translate this “drug-dealers” –
but I have some sympathy as well with those who point to the way
that major pharmaceutical companies have manipulated the market
to get rich off of the pain and misery of those in need...

So how about this: “those who manipulate the natural or supernatural world
in order to further their own wealth and happiness by harming others!”?

(Perhaps you can see why the ESV chose to leave it as “sorcerers” –
and just let pastors explain the word!)

But Jesus tells us that as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable,
the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters,
and all liars –
“their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur,
which is the second death.”

When Jesus speaks of *his people* he describes them as *the thirsty* – those who long for him!
And he describes them as “the one who conquers” –
the one who remains faithful to the end!

Against temptation – against the assaults of the devil – against the lures of Babylon,
and the manipulations of the Beast –
those who belong to Jesus will remain faithful.
But those who turn away from Jesus – to follow the Beast,
those who succumb to the lure of Babylon –
and then *refuse to repent* –

“their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.”

We have this idea nowadays that it’s embarrassing to admit serious sin in the church.

We need to get over it!

Because I fear that the reason why we are afraid to deal openly with it –
is because we don’t really want to turn away from our sin!

And if we repent openly, then we’ll have to!

But verse 8 reminds us that this is no minor matter –

and there are many other passages in scripture that say the same!

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, the apostle Paul says:

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

It can be easy to stop there.

It can be easy to say: “Aha! None of *those people* will inherit the kingdom of God!!”

But Paul doesn’t stop there:

¹¹ *And such were some of you.*

Paul makes two things equally clear:

These practices are entirely unacceptable to God.

But also, those who are guilty of such things can still be saved!!

No sin puts you beyond the reach of the grace of God!!

That’s why Paul goes on to say:

*But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

You are no longer who you once were!!

So what do we do if one who is a believer is guilty of such a thing?

I think that we tend to single out certain sins:

Adulterers – homosexuals – these tend to be the ones we focus on today.

But Paul includes idolaters, thieves, drunkards, the greedy, revilers, and swindlers.

When one who has been washed – who has been sanctified –

who has been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus –

falls into serious sin,

it is important to repent –

and when the sin is public, it is important that the repentance be public as well.

Last year, our dear brother, Michael Durant,
passed out drunk in our house on a Sunday afternoon.

Given that there were forty or so people present, we deemed it a public sin.
Since he is a member of Cedar OPC in Hudsonville, Michigan,
it took a while to work through the process!
(That's why it took so long for today to happen!)

Why is drunkenness on the list of serious sins
that render one unable to inherit the kingdom of God?
It's closely related to the idea of the *pharmakeus* in our text in Revelation –
though the *pharmakeus* is generally one who is using potions to harm *others*.

The drunkard is *drinking* potions in order to harm others!

Because when you are passed-out drunk, you are incapable of loving God or neighbor.
To willfully put yourself in a condition of being unable to love God or neighbor
is a serious problem!

And as we talked with Michael, it was clear that it was *willful*.
He was using alcohol to shut off communication
with friends in Grand Rapids and South Bend!

If you remain in that condition – it is like remaining in sexual immorality,
or remaining as a reviler (one who uses words to destroy people).
And once you are guilty – the only way out is repentance!

Now, I want to make clear that we recognize that everyone's story is complicated!

Our Shorter Catechism says that the fall brought all mankind into *an estate* of sin and misery.
Sin and misery are not two different problems.
There was a whole lot of misery that led to Michael's sin.

And so if all we do is deal with the sin – then we become self-righteous Pharisees.
“I thank God that I am not like that sinner over there!!”

Of course, at the same time, if all we do is deal with misery –
then we wind up saying that sin is okay.
But sin is *not* okay.

It's not okay to use alcohol to shut people out.

Sin only compounds the misery and deepens the divide between us!

When we say that we are *miserable* sinners –

we are not saying that we are *especially* awful people.
No, we are saying that we are *miserable* sinners –
we are miserable – and thus we sin!
There is always a whole lot of misery that leads up to every sin –
and then there is a whole lot of misery that results from every sin!

[Ask Michael and the elders to come forward]

The reason why we want to deal with your sin publicly, Michael,
is not to *shame* you – it's not to increase your misery!
We want to *release* you from the shame!
So that we may *rejoice* together.

When someone has fallen into serious sin, they will never escape the shame of that sin
unless they deal with it open, frankly, and truly –
coming with open, thirsty hearts to Jesus,
longing for the living water that only he can give!

So

1. Do you, Michael, out of a true sense of your own sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, freely confess your sin of drunkenness?

Answer, **I do.**

2. Do you now voluntarily profess your sincere repentance and contrition for your sin and do you humbly ask the forgiveness of God and His people?

Answer, **I do.**

3. Do you sincerely promise, through divine grace, to live in all humbleness of mind and circumspection; and to endeavor to adorn by a holy life the doctrine of God our Saviour?

Answer, **I do.**

Here the minister shall give the penitent a suitable exhortation, encouraging and comforting him.

Beloved brother, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the folly of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. Continue steadfastly in the confession which you have made, humbly relying upon the grace of God in the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer

The whole shall be concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.