

“The Great Beginning” // Revelation 21–22 // *Revelation* #12 (Su 11:15)¹

[Bumper Video: CATD Recap]

Announcement / [VAMP](#)

Well, CATD was... amazing.

- Over 21,000 in attendance
- We were also able to give a love gift of over \$200,000 to local schools there to help meet some needs they have.
- Over 1,000 of you volunteered, some of you getting there at 6am and staying until well after 6pm. Thank you. As a thanks for your service I'm pretty sure Jesus will give you front row seats in the Heavenly Dean Dome.
- And maybe best of all, there were **376 baptisms**; plus, another 100 people who came forward and started conversations about being baptized, but slowed down the decision to take a week or so to make sure they understood everything, and many of those will be baptized today
- **BTW, if you were at the first service on Sunday** and thought your concession stand order was taking a little longer than usual, that's because when I gave the invitation one of the concession stand workers turned to their coworker and said, “Hey, if the manager

comes up here tell them I went to get baptized.” Then he came down to us and said, “Uhh... I don't have a ticket, but I just listened to that whole message and I want to get baptized.” And we said, “Too bad, you have to have a ticket.” Just kidding. He prayed to receive Christ and got baptized!

- And maybe one of my favorite scenes: I gave the invitation, there was a guy who was heading down the stairs toward the floor, and he gets probably halfway down toward the bottom of the little rising part, and he stops and turns around and looks back up, you know, several rows, and he's like, “Come on.” And I don't know who he was talking to, but then a bunch of people passed him, and he did it again, “Just come on,” and he kind of waited for another 20–30 seconds, and then you see two broken, weeping people make their way down the aisle; and he put his arm around them and they walked into the baptismal tunnel. And what it reminds me of is that everything we experienced is not because I preached a sermon or we did an event, it's because of the investments that you are making in people's lives as you share the gospel across relational lines.

So, one more time--at all campuses--could we express our thanksgiving to God?

I'm gonna pray and express our thanksgiving to God, but let me give one word to those of you who might be new, maybe made a decision

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Keller, “[The New Jerusalem](#)”, July 4, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Tim Keller, “[The Two Cities](#),” June 27, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Matt Chandler, “Your New Home”, Session 8 of The Overcomers Bible Study of the Book of Revelation, rightnow Media and Harper Christian Resources, May 7, 2024;

Louie Giglio, “[All Things New](#)”, October 20, 2024, Passion Church; Jen Wilkin, “On Earth as it is in Heaven”, Session 10 of Revelation: Eternal King, Everlasting Kingdom Bible Study, July 1, 2024; Dr. Conway Edwards, “[The Real Happily Ever After](#)”, December 16, 2023, One Community Church; Craig Groeschel, “[Your End Times](#).” And others as noted throughout.

last week: whether or not you make it as a follower of Jesus has less to do with your sincerity last weekend and more to do with whether you get involved in a local church. It's the decision after the decision that usually makes or breaks you. Jesus doesn't call you to make an emotional one-time decision but to become a lifetime disciple, and getting involved in the local church is how you do that. Campus pastors will tell you more at the end. Let's pray.

PRAYER/VAMP

OK: Could we all stand together for the reading of God's word! I'm going to put it on the screen here for us. Every week, we've tried to read a significant section of Revelation because of the promises in Revelation about the blessing of hearing God's Word read aloud. So, you listen as I read it.

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 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. 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."

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

22:1 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 2 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. 3 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. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 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.

6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Thank you; you may be seated.

****End Vamp****

We're at the end. Not just the end of the book of Revelation, but the end of the world as we know it; and John ends with *a final vision of glorification, and a grand new beginning*.

Now, **TWO caveats as we start:**

- First, *I've never personally been to heaven* myself. Which may disappoint some of you, because it seems like the **best way to publish a best-selling Christian book** is to claim you've been to heaven personally and you're ready to tell everyone what you saw. Those books can be interesting, but be clear that everything **you really need to know** about heaven is in **here** (Bible). Full stop.

And you should be really careful about anything that attempts to add to what we see here, because at the end of Revelation John literally says, "If anyone adds to [the prophecies in this book], God will add to him the plagues described in this book." (Rev 22:18)

So, I'd be super careful about trying to learn a lot more from sources outside of this.

- **The second caveat is that I want to acknowledge that a lot of us have a secret fear about heaven--namely,** that we're afraid it's going to be boring--And maybe you've never admitted that, and I'm going to just go ahead and verbalize it, and you don't have to look at me all fake like you've never thought it. But it feels like an eternal choir practice, a weird "floaty state" where we meander about in diapers, strumming our harps, shooting each other with Nerf arrows and sipping on non-alcoholic Pina Coladas.² And you're like, "Look, I love a good church service as much as the next guy, but it just feels like it's gonna be kind of boring. And a bit tedious."

But that's because most of us grew up with the wrong view of heaven. Revelation 21–22 gives us the right view, but you have to know how to read the symbols, which has been key in our study of *Revelation*.

There are **4 words** that encapsulate the vision of heaven from these chapters...

Word# 1. Renewal (21:1–2)

In **vs. 1** John sees a "**new** heaven and **new** earth."

² See Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*. For example, Isaac Asimov, the science fiction writer, said: "I don't believe in an afterlife. So, I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For

- ***This is important:*** There are two words in Greek for "new." There's neos, which means "brand new." And then there's 'kainos', the word used here, which means "remade" or "restored."
- You say, "Why is that significant?" It means heaven is not some brand new state unlike anything we've ever experienced. It's a renewed, restored, remade, kainos version of the world we live in now.
 - Think about it: If a **mechanic told you he'd gone to a junkyard, found an old Corvette** and restored it, if he showed it to you, you wouldn't expect him to bring out some completely different contraption--a helicopter or a computer. You'd expect to see a **flashy, beautifully-painted, souped-up version** of a Corvette...
- The final vision of Revelation is a souped-up, fully healed, restored version of earth; the earth as God intended it to be, only now even more beautiful for having gone through the process of shattering and restoration.
- Notice **vs 2** says that this new Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth.
 - Why do I point that out? Because WE always talk about leaving earth and going UP to heaven, but the biblical vision at the end is actually the opposite: heaven comes down to us; we don't go up to it.
 - As Tim Keller said, "**Heaven is not so much 'pie in the sky' as it is a 'feast on earth.'**"

whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse."

British theologian **N.T. Wright** says that we get a glimpse of all this in the resurrection of Jesus, which Paul calls the “**firstfruits**” of the new creation.³

- “**Firstfruits**” means the first produce of the harvest, which gives you a sampling of what comes after it.
- Jesus’ resurrection was a sampling of the world’s future and your future.
- His resurrected body was not some brand new concoction: It had **continuity** with his past physical body: **people recognized him**. He talked. He walked. He ate food.
- And yet, his body was also massively improved. Fully healed. Glorified. He glowed. He walked through walls. He flew around.⁴

The new heavens and earth are everything that we loved about the old heavens and earth, only now healed from the curse of sin and supercharged with God’s power.

Tim Keller says, “Deep inside every created thing—men, women, mountains, all of it—are reservoirs of glory and power untapped and completely hidden.” In the new heavens, those hidden reservoirs are tapped and revealed.

Frankly, Summit, I get downright giddy sometimes imagining what it’s going to be like.

- I mean, let me just go right at it: What does the **glorified, heavenly Hawaii** look like? *I mean, the still-scarred-by-sin version is pretty good*. What does the resurrected, restored, glorified Hawaii look like?
- What does a **glorified ribeye** taste like?
- What’s it like to eat at the glorified **Waffle House**?

- **How entertaining are glorified movies?** Does **Nic Cage** star in every role? He has to.
- **Church at the Dome was awesome**. But what does worship in the glorified Dean Dome feel like?
- You tracking with me?

In heaven, we’ll experience **pleasure without pain**, beauty untainted by the curse! Joy without end.

- **The beach... without the sunburn.**
- **Krispy Kreme... but where the “Hot Now” sign always stays on.**
- **Chick-fil-A... open on Sundays**
- **Disneyworld** without the lines and the heat
- **The Jersey Shore... without the Jersey.**
- There, I’m convinced, **ice cream** and **hot donuts** are good for you and kale salad and broccoli make you gain weight. I can’t prove that, but who knows.

You say, “Well, what was the deal in vs 1 about ‘no more sea’ and no more ‘night’? I mean, watching the sun set over the ocean is one of the most beautiful, heavenly things I’ve ever seen.”

- This is where you have to understand symbolism. In the Bible, ‘the sea’ always represented chaos, a world outside the loving control of God.⁵
- “Night’ represents cold darkness without God.
- John is not saying that there is literally no more ocean or that the earth stops rotating and heaven is one never-ending day, or like we’re living in Sweden in the month of June.
- He’s saying that in the new heavens and new earth, chaos and darkness and fear have been forever banished.

³ 1 Cor 15:20, 23

⁴ N.T. Wright says that Jesus’ resurrection is the appetizer to the full-course meal of restoration; the trailer to the blockbuster film of redemption.

⁵ Gen 1:2

The number that dominates these two chapters is the number “12,” 12 angels at 12 gates with 12 foundations made of 12 jewels and measuring 12,000 cubits and 12 different kinds of leaves and several others. ‘12’ is the biblical number of fullness and 10 is the number of completion, and there are 10 total 12s in these chapters. IOW, it’s all fulfilled; it’s all complete. Creation is resurrected and renewed. Here’s our 2nd word.

2. Reunion (21:3)

Vv 3–4 says that when the new heaven and new earth come down, **God takes up residence with his people**, death and pain are abolished, and God wipes away every tear from our eyes.

One of God’s purposes in salvation has been to create an eternal family united by a love that never fades, where we never experience heartache and we never have to say goodbye.⁶

- There, Summit, in heaven, we’ll be reunited with those loved ones in Jesus who we lost on earth, or at least lost contact with. Many of the prophets talked about this day; one of my favorites was the **prophet Isaiah** when he said in chapter 49 of his book: **This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “[In that day], I will give the signal and they will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.”** (Isa 49:22, NLT) **Parents who have lost children**—maybe through an accident, a disease, or a miscarriage—If that’s you, Isaiah is just saying, one day, you need to understand, you’ll see them brought back to you by the angels carrying them in their arms. **What a day that will be!**

⁶ Ephesians 1:15–22

Of course, our greatest **reunion is with God himself**. 21:3, “... the dwelling place of God is [now] with man.” In chapter 22 he communicates it through a metaphor. He talks about a “... river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 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.”

- Tyler Staton showed us a couple of weeks ago that a “river” is one of the oldest biblical metaphors for God’s Spirit. God’s Spirit flows from the Temple, into every nook and cranny of the new heavens and new earth, bringing abundance and healing wherever he goes as he saturates everything.
- When you become a believer, the Holy Spirit enters you. In 2 Corinthians Paul calls that the first fruits, or downpayment, of his eternal union with us.⁷ Here, in heaven, that union becomes complete. The filling of the Spirit that we received when we became believers was just the first fruits; there, it’s complete union with God as the river flows to the whole creation.

Vs 4 of chapter 22 tells us that Jesus’s name will be tattooed on our foreheads. I’m **not sure if that’s symbolic or not, but** a tattoo signifies something permanent, right?

- I’ve shown you **(PIC) my tattoo “V”**—it stands for Veronica—it means for the rest of our earthly lives, we’re together. She said, “Well, what if I leave you?” I said, “Well, if you flip it over, it becomes ‘A’ for ‘Available.’ See how that works? Just kidding. No, I told her, if you leave me, I’m going with you.” and she got one that says “J.” **(PIC)** These were super fun to get, by the way **(PIC)**. And that’s the whole point; a tattoo like that implies permanence. There God writes his name on our foreheads. He is ours and we are his, forever.

⁷ Romans 8:23; 2 Cor 1:21–22.

Hear this: The greatest joy of heaven is reunion, and the **greatest reunion** is union with God. If that's not what you're most looking forward to in heaven, I think you've missed the point:

- In fact, **John Piper** asks it this way: "The critical question for our generation — and for every generation — is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, **if Christ were not there?**"
- Ask yourself: If you could have every other blessing of heaven--eternal life, streets of gold, no pain, all your loved ones present--but Jesus wasn't personally there, would it feel like heaven? (*Hold up BIBLE!*) The whole point of all of this is God uniting himself to his people--to YOU. That's what salvation is about. And if that's not what you most look forward to in heaven, you have to ask yourself: Are you even his child? The evidence of God's Spirit in you is a desire to be with him. And if you're not excited about being with him here, you probably wouldn't enjoy heaven. And if you don't love and trust him and want to spend time with him now, you're not going to suddenly start wanting that in heaven.
- **You say, "Well, Pastor, I don't know if I have that desire. What do I do?"** Ask God for it. That's what he says, right? Ours is a good Father. If anybody asks for the Holy Spirit, he will surely give it to them. It's one of the many things that flows from the finished cross and the bloody tomb. **3rd word...**

3. Realization (21:4)

21 v. 4 tells us Jesus will wipe away all tears and mourning and crying will be no more. Sometimes people ask, "Well, does that mean he

erases all our memory of pain--he pulls out one of those flashy sticks like in Men in Black and snaps it and then we can't remember anything from before?

No, in heaven our awareness of things is increased, not decreased. In heaven we'll cease our mourning because we see that God has transformed all our pain into good just like he's promised.

There's two metaphors the Bible uses for how we'll see pain as we enter heaven. **The first is in Romans 8**; Paul says in eternity we'll see our pain here like the birth pangs before labor. **Listen**, having walked through this four times with Veronica, I know birth pangs are no joke--and I know I've never personally experienced them, but I told Veronica she's never had to be a man with a cold, so we're even. But I know they are painful. But it's amazing how the moment that baby is born, and you hold it in your arms, you are just not thinking about the pain anymore. It's not that you can't remember it; it's just so outweighed by the joys of a new creation.

I have a friend who's about my age who, when he was in his early 30s, got brain cancer; the doctors told him that he likely wouldn't make it more than a couple of years. It was tragic; he had two kids about my kids' age. But he had a deep and sincere faith in Jesus, and he spent a lot of time thinking about Jesus' promises to people in pain, and someone asked him, "Do you feel like when you get to heaven, Jesus is going to explain to you all the reasons for the pain?" He said, "I feel like when I get to heaven I'm gonna be like, "What pain are you talking about?" It's not that we look back and see the reasons bad things happen and say, 'Oh... that's why that happened!' Rather, we will say, 'What bad things?' In that moment, we will be so consumed with God's finished product we will scarcely remember the process he used!

Which brings me to the 2nd metaphor: digestion. In 1 Cor 15:54 Paul says *"Death is swallowed up in victory."*

- **When you swallow something**, it becomes part of you, right? That burger you ate last night literally becomes a part of you. And it will be for a long time, right?
- Paul says that our experiences of pain and mourning become a part of us, and we're better and deeper for having gone through them.
- I've told you about the ancient Japanese art form of **kintsugi** (PIC) --where the artist fashions a beautiful, ornate pot, but then, in the final step, he shatters it into pieces, and then mends those pieces back together with gold in the seams--so that the value of the pot having been put back together with gold in the seams is exponentially more than before it was broken.
- That's the imagery here: God has woven his victory into our pain so that our value and our joy is exponentially more having gone through it all than it was before we were broken.

But that does bring up an uncomfortable question for me: *"What about our loved ones or friends who never trust Jesus and don't make it to heaven? How can heaven be a place of no more tears if people I love aren't there?"*

- I have to tell you, honestly, I don't fully know the answer to that. (This is one of those unanswered questions for me that I sometimes tell you about).
- You see, in heaven, our capacity for love is increased, not decreased, so I ask, "How can heaven be heaven if someone I love is not there?"
- And I don't fully know. **Theologian J.I. Packer** says that maybe in heaven our moral compass will be so fully aligned with God--we'll

see his glory and justice like he sees them--and that will resolve our questions.

- In his book ***The Great Divorce***, **C.S. Lewis** makes the point that hell is self-chosen. In the story, people in hell take a bus ride up to heaven, and as much as they hate hell, they hate a place dominated by God's glory and control and beauty even more. They want to go back to hell because that's how badly they hate a place where God is fully in control. So, in heaven, Lewis says, we understand and agree with God's justice, even though it means acknowledging the self-chosen ruin of others.
- That's where I **think** the answer is... Beyond that, I don't know what to tell you. I just know I trust him. He's the God who died for me and rose again, and I know I can trust him with this. Revelation 15 says that up in heaven we will rejoice in the righteousness and justice of God. Nobody's going to be saying, "But God, what about..." or "How could you?" And, "Why didn't you think about ...?" and "Didn't you forget ...?" I know that when I look backward from eternity what will amaze me is not the severity of his judgment but the magnanimity of his mercy. So, for now, I trust him, and plead with everyone around me to come to Jesus.

Fourth word,

4. Reign (22:5)

- Vs 5 says *"... and they will reign forever and ever."*

- You say, “Reign over what exactly?” Well, it clearly includes creation itself,⁸ since that’s been God’s plan from the beginning, for us to have dominion over and rule over creation, but in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul says we’ll rule over angels, too.⁹ So there’s something beyond just the earth. **So, it includes that in some way.**
- **C.S. Lewis thought** this indicates that we will reign as kings and queens over future universes God creates.
 - My **favorite part of all *The Chronicles of Narnia*** is how he ends book 7. And some of you never made it past book one. Go all the way to the end; the best part is at the very end: “So for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”
- To be clear: I’m **not sure exactly whom we reign over**, but I’m looking forward to finding out.
- Hey, that person sitting next to you, if they’re a believer, you better treat them right. They are destined to rule one day. That’s a prince or princess. You might want to touch them right now.

4 words that describe our experience with heaven: Renewal, Reunion, Realization, and Reign.

⁸ This was part of the original vision of Gen 1–2, man reigning with God over creation. It was seen, for example, in his naming of the animals and in God’s statement that Adam and Eve should have dominion over the earth.

⁹ **G.K. Beale** sees two possibilities. He thinks (1) we “reign” in the same way Adam and Eve were to **exercise dominion**—not over people, but over the new earth.

And they all start with “R,” which proves they are from the Holy Spirit. Let me draw 3 quick conclusions from this before I go on to John’s final vision.

The first one: **A. Put up your bucket list!**

Bucket lists are those things you want to do before you kick the bucket because you assume you’ll never have a chance to do them again after you die.

- But I asked you a couple of weeks ago: Is a bucket list ever really appropriate for a Christian? I mean, in Revelation, Jesus promises us a “renewed heaven” and “renewed earth.” In **21:5**, talking about this renewed heaven and earth, Jesus said, he was ‘making ALL things new.’
 - **Wouldn’t** “ALL” there include Mt. Everest, and the stars, rivers, oceans, planets, animals, culture, arts, music, architecture and extreme sports that you never got to experience?
 - **Does your Bible have an asterisk** above that word ALL with a list of things in fine print that are not included in that word? **All means all, church.**
 - That means *for those of you who are single*, the joys of marriage and family will be in some way even more greatly fulfilled there. I don’t fully know how.
 - To the childless, the blessings of a full family. To the poor, eternal riches. To the physically weak, those with chronic pain, strength and vitality.

Beale also thinks (2) we rule over the **holy angels** (Neh. 9:6, Heb. 2:5-7) **Grant Osborne** thinks that the reign is mostly metaphorical—not over angels or other people, but just being given **honor** and **power**. **Alan F. Johnson** thinks there is a relationship of **mutual reigning and serving**, since verse 3 says that the people in this kingdom will *serve*, but they are the same ones that will *reign* in verse 5.

- o EVERYTHING you miss out on now, you'll experience in abundance then.
- **Rev 21:26** even says that **"They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations."** (21:26) Which **means the best of culture.**
 - The best Italian food. The best of Arabian and Colonial architecture, which are my favorite. Mardi Gras without all the drugs and debauchery and hangovers.
- So, does it make sense to have a bucket list? No! Because **YOLO** <(you only live once) is not true. The reality is **YALF** (you actually live forever). This is atheist; this is Christian.
- Whatever you don't get to down here, you'll have more than ample opportunity to do up there. **Except, for one thing:** There is one thing you can't do there that you can only do here: *tell your lost loved ones about Jesus*. So put that on your bucket list. Plan to spend your retirement years investing in that, not going on some second-rate golf vacation--because I promise you that compared to what's waiting for you up there, playing Pebble Beach will seem like one of those cheap Putt-Putt courses at Myrtle Beach. Spend your retirement years winning people to Jesus, serving the church, and laying up treasures there.

Second thing, **B. Cease your raging against aging**

Listen, I feel it. I used to say this self-righteously to all you older people; now I am one of you older people. I hate aging. I'll just say it. I used to drink a 2 liter of Mountain Dew and eat a sleeve of Oreos right before bed and I gained no weight slept through the night like a baby. Now I've got charts that describe how much of what kind of foods I can eat at what time of day and which minute in the day is the last possible one I can drink caffeine.

- The other morning my wife noticed I was limping and she said, "What did you do?" I said, "I don't know. I was fine when I went

to bed; I must've turned my ankle when I was sleeping." Apparently I'm at the age now where I get hurt sleeping. Some of you know what I'm talking about. You're the age where your back goes out more than you do.

- You 20 year olds, laugh it up. It's coming for you. I heard a guy say, "As you get older, three things happen. The first is your memory goes... and I can't remember the other two."

And the temptation is to fight so hard to hold onto your youth. To nip, tuck, color, tighten, fill, inject... whatever. And I'm not saying that keeping yourself looking fit as you get older is wrong; I'm just saying that for some of you it's driven by unbelief--like you're losing life, trying to hold onto something you can't hold onto--and that despair is fueled by unbelief in the promises of God.

There is a river, John says, with constantly renewing power, and it's better than 10,000 shots of Botox. And won't make you look as weird. In the new heavens and new earth, as the river of life flows through them, they become newer and newer, brighter and brighter, more vivid, more coherent, more whole and more beautiful every second, on and on forever.¹⁰ So don't fight your body getting old now! Let it happen beautifully and gracefully. Preach your hope in the resurrection even in how you age.

C. Know Where You Belong

Sometimes atheists and agnostics hear this and they say, "You Christians use this pie in the sky to motivate people. 'Join our team and you get a free Disneyworld vacation when it's all over!' That's not what this is. This vision shows you your telos; what you were created for. There's something deep inside of you that knows you're not just a biological accident; a bag of chemicals and randomly firing neurons

¹⁰ Tim Keller

that has a few brief moments of consciousness before devolving back into primordial soup. You were created by an eternal God, in his image, for things that matter—for meaning, for eternity. And there’s something about this vision of the new heavens and new earth that resonates deeply within us, and we say ‘Yes, *this... this* is what I’m created for.’

Like you’re in a room full of art... you can look around and know that this room was designed with something greater in mind.

Well, as much as I want to, I can’t end this message talking only about heaven. Because John includes in this final vision a glimpse of the other destination—eternal death.

So let’s go back to chapter 21: (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.”

Y’all, when I read this, I think of the words of Charles Spurgeon: “These are such weighty things that when I dwell upon them, I feel far more inclined to sit down and weep than to stand up and speak to you.”

- I’d prefer to skip all this, but there’s a warning in chapter 22 that says this: **“If anyone adds anything to [these prophecies], God will add to that person the plagues described here. And if anyone takes words away, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City ...”** (Rev 22:18–19) I’m not free to edit, soften, or ‘improve’ this book, and neither are you. This is the Word of God; it sometimes offends us and sits bitterly to our stomachs. But I’m not free to change it. It comes with his authority.

¹¹ “It is a mistake to suppose that the horrors of Hell are exaggerated in the Scriptures. They are actually understatements.” C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

I’m just the messenger. The question is whether you’re going to believe it, or try to tell God that you know better than him and reshape him and his word in your image.

Three crucially important things we learn about hell from these last two chapters:

I. Hell is a place of eternal misery (20:10; 21:8)

- These **images are awful**. *Fire, burning sulfur, eternal death.*
- And maybe you’d prefer to read these things as symbolic. **But even if there are some symbolic elements in these images, and clearly there are some**, they point to a terrible reality. As **C.S. Lewis** said, Symbols in the Bible usually point to **realities** MORE intense, not LESS intense, than the symbols.¹¹ **Whatever these things are pointing to, the reality is unspeakably awful.**
- **People say to me, “Is hell really eternal?”** I have to assume so, because the same Greek word used for “everlasting” in “everlasting life” is used in everlasting death.” So it would seem inconsistent to say one is actually eternal and the other just a metaphor.¹² Now, I’d love to be wrong about that—I’d love to get to heaven and find out I was wrong about *all* of this—but I just don’t see how to read it any other way.

Which leads me to the 2nd thing...

II. Hell is a door locked from the inside (22:11)

Notice **what the angel says** about hell in **Revelation 22:11**: **“Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”**

¹² 14:10–11; 20:10, 14–15; 21:8

IOW, people in hell never repent. Those who loved filthiness here continue to love it there. The rebellious here remain haters of God's authority there. Those who loved boasting in themselves here remain focused on that there, and they'd hate being in a place where God gets the glory and God was in charge.

- **Yes, of course, people in hell hate the torment aspect,** but they hate the **authority of God more**. Again, that's why in his book *The Great Divorce* the people from hell who go visit heaven want to go back to hell; because as much as they hate the torments of hell, they hate being in a place where God is in charge even more. If you hate it now, you'll hate it then.¹³

Some theologians have said this refusal and inability to repent is what is being communicated through the images of eternal fire and the worm that never dies.

- **Fire throughout the Bible sometimes represents insatiable desire.**¹⁴ The more you feed a fire, the more it grows. That's sin. The more you feed it, the more it grows until it takes over your whole being.
- The **worm never dying points** to wicked temptations that burrow their way into you and eventually eat you from the inside out.
- **Hell is where the sins you wouldn't repent of on earth consume you, burning in your heart like a never-ceasing fire, eating away at your soul like a worm until they consume you:** your **jealousy**; your **selfishness**; your **racism**; your **hate**; your **pride**; your lack of self-control; your **bitterness**; your **dishonesty**; your lack of trust **consumes you**.

¹³ John Paul Sartre, in his play *No Escape...* depicts hell with the door open, and no one leaves.

"Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy..." Death represents a line where you become fixed eternally in the decisions you made on earth.

But friend, hear me: it's not too late to repent now. Today is the day of salvation. If you let him, Jesus can forgive your sin and break its power in you, but if you ignore this day, there is coming a day when salvation is no longer possible and you are hardened, fixed, in the trajectories you set on earth.

One more...

III. Hell is our current default destination (21:8)¹⁵

I know that's a shocking one, but let me explain. Look at the list John gives in **vs (8)** of those who go into eternal torment: You've got the ones you'd expect: the detestable--rapists and abusers; murderers, sorcerers. Of course. But notice who else this list includes.

- The **Cowardly**: IOW, those who wouldn't stand boldly for Jesus; who wouldn't confess Jesus in front of their friends; who held some of their convictions back because of peer pressure.
- The **Faithless**: IOW, those who went to church but didn't trust God enough to fully obey him—they never tithed because they wouldn't trust God fully with their money—they could never really get to the 10 percent because, "Hey, I gotta use that to pay for stuff"; they didn't seek purity in their thought life because they thought illicit sexual pleasure was too enjoyable to give up, certainly in their mind. Those who worried all the time because they could just never be confident that God's goodness really was in control in their lives.

¹⁴ Proverbs 30:16, "...fire never says 'enough!'"

¹⁵ Pastor Craig Groeschel

- **Idolaters**: those who had something in their heart that displaced God as first in their affections. They had something that captured your attention and dominated their agenda more than God and his glory.
- The **sexually immoral**: Jesus said, of course, that includes not only those who act on sexual temptations, but even those who fantasize about them in their hearts.
- And **all liars**: Those who bent the truth or weren't completely honest in their dealing with God or others.

Are there any of us *not* represented on that list? *There is none righteous, no not one. There is none who does good; there is none who seek after God. We have all turned aside and become unprofitable. There is none good, no not one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Every one of us, by default, is headed for hell. We think the default is heaven and we only go to hell if we're exceptionally bad. But Scripture teaches that we're all exceptionally bad, which is why Jesus had to come to save us.

(VAMP)

But **look at the incredible words** that follow that list, vs 17, **The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."** And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

There is a river of life flowing from the throne of God right now that brings healing and forgiveness. And it's offered to you right here, right now, today, **without price** w/o price for you because the **price was fully paid by Jesus.**

- *There is a fountain, filled with blood! Drawn from Immanuel's veins! And sinners plunged, beneath that flood, LOSE ALL their guilty stains.*
- **All you have to do is come!**

And so, Revelation ends with the voice of the Spirit saying, "Come!" ***Have you taken up that offer?***

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.
15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

THE END. John closes with "grace," because that's what is offered now. Grace to all who will receive it. ***Have you received it? Will you?***

Bow your heads...

- Some of you have never been saved. You've never received Jesus personally. You've never personally drunk from the water of life,

or you're not sure you have. You don't just automatically get this by going to church. You have to personally choose to receive Christ.

- o If that's you--you've never personally received Jesus, or you're not sure you have, I'm going to give you a prayer to pray with me. These are not magic words, but if they represent a cry of your heart, Jesus will hear it. If you're not sure if you're saved and you want to be sure, here's what you would say. If it comes from your heart, say this after me: "Jesus, I surrender to you." Can you say that? "Come into my life and forgive and change me." Let the water of life pour over you. It's the firstfruits of God coming into you.
- And now, if you prayed that with me, I want to give you another invitation to join the 376 from last weekend and many more today who are being baptized. As I told you, baptism is the public declaration that you are following Jesus, and you are supposed to do it immediately upon choosing to accept Christ as your own. It's the sign that you've gone all in on following Jesus and chosen to follow him as your own. Maybe you just couldn't last week. Or maybe you weren't there. Today is the day. As always, we have everything you need. A change of clothes, a free T-shirt, everything. I'm going to pray for us, and then I'm going to count to 3, stand us all up: Summit, we'll cheer for the 376 from last weekend and the many more today, and as we stand, in one motion, you stand and step. There are baptism counselors in the aisles and all over the buildings, and when you step out, head toward the back, and they'll take it from there.

Missional Blessing:

(Campus Pastors) I want to send you out with a version of the Lord's Prayer I want us to read together. It's written by our friend Jen Wilkin, called this "The Lord's Prayer in the New Jerusalem." Let's stand and read it together, anticipating that day when all these things will be true: "Our Father, who art in heaven, your name is holy, holy, holy. Your kingdom has come, your will has been done on earth as it is in heaven. You have given us daily bread, eternal bread. You have forgiven us all our debts. You have led us into our Sabbath rest, and you have delivered us from evil, fully and finally. And thine is now the Kingdom, the power and glory, forever and ever. Amen."