

New Creation

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone and good morning to everyone watching and listening at home. Keep your Bibles open with me at Revelation 21. Well, we come to it at last, the light at the end of the tunnel.

The things we've been waiting for the whole time, and in fact, this is the hope of all mankind. Revelation 21 is the culmination of the story of the Bible. But because it's the culmination of the story of the Bible, it's the culmination of human history.

It gathers up everything that the Bible has been talking about and lays it all before us as something to be hoped for and longed for. In the last few chapters of Revelation, we've seen how God is clearing away all the evil things in the world.

If you remember, as we've gone through the last few chapters, God has got rid of all the bad things in the world, things that are making His world fall apart. Things that harm and hurt and hinder God's creation and our relationship with Him.

God has been clearing the wedding venue, so to speak. Making it ready for this great wedding celebration that we see at the end of Revelation. So Revelation 21 is all about the wedding venue and telling us what it will be like once all the rubbish has been cleared out.

[1 : 20] And it's a glorious picture of what our future will look like. There's much to have a look at here, but I want us to look at three things in particular. I want us to see that this wedding venue that God is going to prepare for us as His bride, that this wedding venue is going to be gloriously beautiful.

That it will be completely perfect in every way. And that it will be super abundantly sufficient for sustaining life. So those three things as we spend our time together.

First of all, this venue, this place that God is preparing, is going to be gloriously beautiful. Have a look at verse 10 and 11 again, and then later on from 19 to 21.

Just in verse 10 and 11. He carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high. Showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

It shone with the glory of God. And its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel like jasper. Like clear as a crystal.

[2 : 32] And then later on it talks about how the foundations are full of these precious stones. And streets of gold. The overall picture of what is waiting for us is of breathtaking beauty.

And spectacular wealth and worth. And it's a kaleidoscope of color. Perhaps reflecting the colors of the rainbow or those jewels. The perfect place to reflect the shining glory of God.

The creator of the universe. And it's totally unlike earth as we see it now. With its ugliness and its false pretense at beauty. The new earth will be a place totally fit for its creator.

And also for his people. The list of gems that we see there represent two realities from the Old Testament. One is the high priest's breastplate.

Which he wore in order to present God's people as he made sacrifice for them in God's presence in the temple. So those 12 precious stones that are mentioned in verses 19 to 21.

[3 : 42] Capture for us many of the stones that are on the priest's breastplate. Here the whole city is made of the same jewels. Not just the priest's breastplate.

Indicating that this city is the home of the priestly people of God. Not just of Israel. But all of God's people. The multi-ethnic whole community of God.

Then the other place where we find these jewels is found way back in Genesis 2. Actually an interesting place to uncover that. Genesis 2.

I'll just read it for us. In Genesis 2 we've got a river watering the garden flowed from Eden. Just notice that river of water flowing from Eden. Because we'll pick it up again later in chapter 22.

From there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon. It winds to the entire land of Havilla where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good.

[4 : 37] Aromatic resin and onyx are also there. But notice how many more jewels there are now in the new earth. Not just to be picked up from rivers anymore.

But enough to build walls and windows and foundations and gates and roads. What this indicates is we're going to have a super abundance of wealth and riches and blessings in the new earth.

Take the idyllic world of Adam and Eve before sin came in. Genesis 2 is before Genesis 3. The fall of mankind. And Adam and Eve were walking around enjoying God's blessings in the world.

So take the idyllic world of Adam and Eve in Eden. Minus the sin. And then exponentialize it into the new creation. Someone once calculated how much it would cost to build this city.

And it's incredible. This is just for fun really. But it was obviously an engineer. And he said, let's just look at the gold that it would take to make these roads in the city that comes down.

[5 : 44] If each road is 10 meters wide, each road has a cross-sectional area of one square meter times 2.2 millimeters long for a road volume of 2.2 million cubic meters for one road.

There may be around 40,000 roads in this huge city. That's a grand total of 88 billion cubic meters of gold in our roads, which comes out to 67 quintillion dollars.

That's just under 4 million times the U.S. GDP. All right, that's in 2016. So we've got to account for inflation as well. So it would take America 4 million years to save up to build the roads of gold in the New Jerusalem.

Imagine how long it would take us here in South Africa. Imagine where all the gold would go. Yeah, 67 quintillion dollars, that's what the number looks like.

A lot of notes there. Why is God giving us a picture of what the new creation will look like? Why this jewelry? Why this gold?

[6 : 46] Why these riches? Well, interesting enough, it's a picture of both where we will live and who will be living there. The city is the bride.

And the bride is us. Now, brides in the Middle East are richly adorned for their wedding day, far more than the brides that we have in the West.

All brides are pretty on the wedding day. Our brides tend to wear a little ring. Maybe if you're a princess, a little tiara. The brides in the East go full out. They just head to toe.

It looks glorious and beautiful when they get married. So this picture of the city coming down out of heaven is both a picture of a symbolic city, but a physical city, not an actual city.

It's not a city that's going to be as big as it sounds. We'll get to the dimensions in a minute. It's a symbolic city, but it's a real city. But because it's symbolism, it works on a number of different levels, and it's also representing us, because the city is also the bride of Christ, which is us.

[7 : 55] So God is preparing both his people and a place to look pretty and feeling fabulous for their Lord and Master and their King on this great wedding day that's going to come when we get joined together.

Now, we haven't even begun to scratch the surface of how beautiful it would be, but can you think, wouldn't this be the most amazing place to live? A world so full of beauty, the things we consider so precious we only wear on one finger, is used to build the walls of the city, of the buildings that we're going to sleep in, and the roads that we walk on.

And so this city is not just describing the place, but it's describing us as well, the kind of people that will live there. That means that the riches and the glory it describes is us.

We're the diamonds. We're the gold. We're the precious stones. We're the riches. We're the glory of the new creation. It's describing us, our worth, our beauty, and our glory.

Now, just sit back and think about how special that makes you feel. If you're a little bit like me, you've got to work at that, don't you? Don't feel like a diamond. Don't look like a diamond.

[9 : 14] Maybe don't sound like a diamond. But just think about how special that makes us feel.

That God would take something as worthless as we are, and turn us into something this amazing.

Do you remember what we're actually made of? Genesis 1? Mud. Dust. Dirt. Grond. But what are diamonds made of anyway?

Well, not dust. Carbon. Kind of the same thing. And so one day we're going to be, it describes us as we're going to be one day. Now, if God thinks of us like this, doesn't it inspire you to be that kind of person?

Just think about how God thinks of us in the new heaven, in the new earth, in the new creation. We've got much of the stuff that he's going to give us then, he's already given us now, just in deposit form.

We've received the Holy Spirit. Today's Pentecost Sunday. Probably the most precious thing that we can receive, other than Christ himself. Well, it's the power of the Holy Spirit. Doesn't that inspire you to want to be that kind of person?

[10:18] To be someone who can share this kind of beauty and worth into the world? And doesn't the world need this kind of beauty in it? So the first thing we see, it's gloriously beautiful.

And that also somehow means us as well. It's both a place we're going to be, and it's the people who are going to live there. So when you read Revelation 21 again, you read all those beautiful pictures of those stones, remember that that's also going to be you and us.

And then secondly, it's going to be completely perfect in every way. The city as a place will totally conform to the blueprint for creation that God has always wanted.

There will be no imperfections, nothing missing that still needs to be added, nothing that is incomplete that still needs to be done. It will be the perfect place where God can enjoy full fellowship with His people and us with Him and us with each other and us with the created world around us.

And so that's what's described from verse 12 to verse 15. This had a great high wall with 12 gates and 12 angels at the gates, and the gates were written names of the 12 tribes of Israel.

[11:30] There were three gates on the east, three on the north, etc., etc. The wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the names of the apostles. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city.

His measuring rod was of gold. A golden tape measure. That's how beautiful the city is. The stuff you use to measure it is precious. The city was laid out like a square as long as it was wide, measured the city with a rod, and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length.

We'll get into the measurements in a second. And as wide and as high as it's long. He measured its wall. It was 144 cubits thick by man's measurement, which the angel was using.

The high walls speak of security and safety. Now, it's interesting that there are still walls, but again, this is symbolic. But it speaks of safety and security.

This place will never again be overtaken by its enemies. The enemies are already gone, just by the way, by this time in Revelation. So there's nothing. They can't come back.

[12:37] They've all been thrown into the lake of fire. But remember how God first made the world, made it good and full of blessing and life, but how it got marred and messed up with sin and evil.

It was, in a sense, overtaken, but not completely, because God is in control. But the new creation that we're looking forward to can never go back to this old one and never be hurt or harmed again. The gates are there so that everyone who can, who wants to, can enter. Most cities will have one or two gates in the ancient world, maybe four if it's a massive city. This one has three on each side, so everyone who needs to can get inside.

But there's angels there. And they have to stop anyone from coming in who's not welcome. You remember the angel at the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were kicked out? Well, these are similar angels, just saying, hey, you're not allowed here if you're not dressed properly.

Now, the way it's described is the layout of the tabernacle in Exodus with three tribes on each side of the tent, signifying the whole people of God gathered around him in worship.

[13:43] And just in case, for some reason, we think that it means Old Testament Israel, Revelation tells us that the foundations is the apostles, which means all of God's people, both Jew and Gentile, are going to enjoy fellowship with him forever.

Indeed, the sheer size of the city means there's more than enough room for all of God's people who want to be with him in creation. Or rather, that he wants to have with him in creation.

It measures 12,000 stadia. Now, if you remember, the number 12 is a number we've seen that symbolizes completeness and fullness. That symbolizes that the city, the place where we're going to spend eternity, is exactly the right size for whatever is needed.

It is totally and completely fit for purpose. And it totally outdoes anything that the prophets had a vision of in the Old Testament, specifically Ezekiel.

So Ezekiel is the one that has this glorious vision of a temple, renewed temple. His measurements measure paltry three kilometers.

[14 : 51] This one measures 2,500 kilometers. The area, if you do this maths, is 144 million, which is 1,000 times 144,000.

And we've seen that the 144,000 represents the complete number of God's people. A place big enough, with room to spare, for all of God's people to enjoy. Notice it's a cube.

In verse 16, the city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide, and as high. So it's a cube. Now we've come across the shape of this, the shape of this already in Revelation. And anywhere there's a cube, it seems like it's a perfect shape. And so that indicates God's presence, because only God is perfect.

Now the shape of this signifies God's presence, and the shape of it comes from the Old Testament, from the Holy of Holies. I don't know if you noticed that, but I'll give the reference for us in 1 Kings chapter 6, where it's laying out the blueprints for the temple.

[15 : 59] And it says this, He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high.

He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and He also overlaid the altar of cedar, also with gold. Notice the gold being overlaid there, and the gold in this new city. But notice that it's cubed there.

20 cubits wide, 20 long, 20 high. So then this city is one huge, vast Holy of Holies. The enormous size of the city indicates holiness on a worldwide scale.

The new creation will be characterized by holiness. Everything living in complete obedience to God's will, so that nothing bad can be there.

Because the whole world is now holy, this Revelation 21 picture, it's fit for its creator. It will finally become the place where God dwells completely and fully.

[17 : 02] Now not, He's revealed to us, like often in the Old Testament, His holiness has got to be hidden. And only certain people can go and see it at certain times.

Hidden behind walls and veils and temples, and only allowing a very few, especially holy people, to go and see Him. And then only once a year, in the new heavens and the new earth, God is completely available to all His people, all of the time, because we will be completely holy.

Isn't that a place worth living in? It doesn't make you happy to know that your eternal happiness is completely secure, and nothing and no one can take it away. Let's think about our world now.

How do we make our world now look more like the world to come? How do we mirror the multi-ethnic people of God that is going to be present there?

How do we treat other people, other races? How do we talk about them? Based on our function as a priest in this new heavens and the new earth, how much of a priest are we being to our family and our friends in our world?

[18 : 13] What are we doing to enable them to enjoy this great city and its benefits? How are we presenting it to them? And then thirdly, this new creation will be super abundantly sufficient for all our needs.

Super abundantly sufficient for all our needs. Now sufficiency here, I'm trying to find a different word, but it's going to have everything we need. And everything will be available for us, and everything bad will be banished.

Everything good will be available, and everything bad will be banished. We will have everything we need to enjoy God, to enjoy His creation, and enjoy everyone else in it forever and ever, with nothing to threaten that enjoyment.

So have a look at chapter 22, in verse 1 to 4. The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

[19 : 21] The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will see Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

And so we've got this picture of this river, of the water of life, running down the main street of the city. God's goal has always been to create and to sustain life.

Because of sin, God had to deal out punishment and death. But here He is, supplying the thing He most wants to. Life. Abundant.

Good. Clean. Life in all its fullness. The plan that He's always had for creation. And next to this water of life is the tree of life. And it's easy access.

It's in the middle of the city. Now the tree of life and the waters of life take us all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Remember the tree of life was barred from Adam and Eve.

[20 : 27] They couldn't take from it. Meaning, life in the world that God created is going to be full of death. But here it is, fully available and constantly giving up life.

The trees and the fruit are there all the time. There will be an overabundance of things sufficient for life in the new creation. We will never not have life and never not have access to life.

There will be healing for all who needs it. And nothing can take that away. Unlike Eden, where life was unsecured, it is now eternally secured. Notice that nothing cursed will live there.

Verse 3, nothing cursed. There's going to be no curse. That again takes us back to Genesis 3, where God was forced, in a sense, to curse the world because of man's sin. But our sin has now been taken away.

Nothing will ever be able to make anything in God's creation bad again. Man will not be able to sin. We will be free to worship and honor God properly and fully as we were meant to be.

[21 : 29] Free from the curse. Freedom from the curse that we live in in this world is fully realized in the new creation. Total freedom. And God himself will make sure of that.

Notice what he does to his people in the new world here? He'll wipe away our tears, take away our sadness, death will be banished, mourning, crying, pain, gone.

No bodily pain. No psychological pain. No regret. No shame. Nothing to hide. Just us and God living together and having a lovely time.

Isn't that a world worth living in? Isn't that a world worth sacrificing everything for? Isn't that a world worth holding onto and gritting it out in the hard times now?

Never giving up on the hope but staying the course, knowing that we have this water of life in our lives because of Christ. and what are we doing so that others may see this picture of what's waiting for us and how inviting do we make it to them?

[22 : 37] Now there's much more to explore in Revelation 21-22. We don't have time to cover everything but I want us to think through two things or rather rethink through two things.

I want us to rethink holiness and I want us to rethink heaven. So just a word about holiness. I think we've often got the wrong idea about holiness.

Holiness often sounds it's clean and it's pure but it can sometimes sound a little too clinical and quite frankly boring. Like a hospital.

You don't go to hospital because it's beautiful. You go to hospital because you need to. But for God holiness is beauty and the holiness here the beauty here it inspires and calls out feelings of deep longing.

It attracts. The whole point about Revelation 21-22 is making you say oh yeah that sounds like a nice place to live. I'd like to be there. It's not holier than now but a holiness that causes that which is unholy to want to be like that and not to be like what it is.

[23 : 50] The beauty of God stirs up deep longings that we almost don't have words for but which each of us know we need in order to find wholeness and healing. And so we need to rethink how we talk about and think about holiness.

One way to do that is to link holiness to creation. Genesis chapter 1 creation was made good and it was good because it was doing what it was supposed to do.

it was holy in that sense. When humans decide to sort of color outside the lines that God had provided for them and do their own thing you know it always ends in disaster. It always ends in hurt. It always ends in regret and pain. But being holy is the same as being good at the beginning of creation. Living the life that God always intended for us and we always result if we do that always result in blessing and enjoyment.

And so here at the end of Genesis 1 where holiness was part of creation but then gets broken at the end here at Revelation 21 holiness again is part of creation but it's couched in terms of beauty and loveliness.

[24 : 55] So how good are we at making holiness attractive? How can we make holiness look beautiful? Something for us to think about in our lives. And then secondly and lastly we need to

rethink heaven.

And by rethinking heaven I mean not think of the new creation as heaven. We have to remember that here in Revelation 21 and 22 it's talking about a new earth.

The place where we are going to be staying. Yes, heaven is in some sense here there in the new creation but it's not called heaven. In fact the whole city, the temple, the people, this picture is coming down out from heaven.

It's said it a number of times. Have a look at chapter 21 and verse 1 and 2. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for a husband.

[26 : 04] Now far too many Christians don't believe in a new creation at all. They believe in a new heaven but for some reason not a new earth and so they read half that verse oh I saw a new heaven oh we're going to go live in heaven.

Well no. There's a new creation a new earth and we're going to live there. Too many of us have this dualistic idea a sort of two-tone universe that the physical world is bad and the spiritual world is good and the only way to salvation is to escape the physical world and go and live in the spiritual world.

But the goal of the entire story of the Bible is not for us to leave earth but that God is going to fix it so that we can live there. If you think about how the story of the Bible works where does it start? In heaven or on earth? Well it starts on earth. Where does it go wrong? In heaven or on earth? Well it goes wrong on earth. What is God's plan? Is salvation taking everyone out of this broken world and say hey just come live with me in heaven or is his plan to fix the broken world and fix the broken people in the world so they get to fix the broken world as they live lives before they die and until we get to enjoy the whole new thing again.

And so the whole story ends with God reestablishing what he wanted for creation and for his people. Yes, in the meantime there's separation and here at the end of time the separation is not just minimized but almost eradicated so that heaven and earth are finally joined together again but it's not called heaven it's still called earth.

[27 : 45] The word that sums all of this up is the word new. It occurs a few times in this text. A brand spanking clean beautiful earth. A new everything. A new here doesn't just mean new as in new in time but it means renewed.

Do you see probably the most important verse there then is verse 5. The one seated on the throne said look I am making everything new.

The Greek word new there means it's a it's a it's something that has new in quality it's an innovation it's a fresh or new development or fresh or new opportunity a new circumstance alive with possibilities and that's how the Bible talks about it.

Remember how it describes us in Christ in Corinthians Paul says therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation or depending on the Greek the new creation has come which is probably more true to the sentiment.

As we live our lives here we get to we get infused with new creation life because of the Holy Spirit and because of Christ's resurrection. The old is gone the new is here and we must place our hope in the right thing in a new creation and then we must talk about that to others we must stop thinking of heaven as a home but of the new earth as our home and what a lovely and exciting place it will be.

[29 : 07] The world will quite literally be our playground and all our friends and family will be there and it will be the most fun and the best of times. The image I often have is of a father working with his son in his workshop teaching him all the tools of the trade.

Let me show you how to do this. He lets the son go off son goes out makes a thing that him and his father have been practicing making he comes back all excited dad dad look what I've done look what I've made dad looks down and says yeah great job very impressed well done just wait until I see what I have for us to do tomorrow and for the Christian that's what we've got to look forward to just us and God surrounded but with all our friends exploring God's world living our skills out to the best of our abilities with nothing hindering us reaching our full potential in one sense as God's people on planet earth if you're a non-Christian though you don't want to miss out on this and you

will be excluded unless you come to Christ and do that before time is up and join us in enjoying God and all the blessings of eternal life forever and ever well let's pray together Lord God your new world that you're making ready for us is amazing beyond words we've barely scratched the surface but we know it will be gloriously beautiful it will be completely perfect and we'll have everything we need to enjoy life to the full

Lord God help us to be agents of the new creation in our world now so that we may gather more people into your people so that they can enjoy it and help us to be a blessing to others as we do so in Jesus name Amen