

INTRODUCTION

As we've journeyed through Revelation; we've seen God's word to the church. We've travelled through times of brutal challenge, which are really the final refining of God's people. And we've read the horrors of God's wrath as He meets out perfect justice.

REVELATION FROM THE THRONE & THE BOOKS

By chapter 20, the vision turns heavenward and the trials are behind us. Now we get to see what it was all for. ***Let's spend some time simply walking through the meaning of the verses:***

Rev 20

11. Then I saw a **great white throne** and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

12. And I saw the **dead, small and great**, standing before God, and **books were opened**. And another book was opened, which is the **Book of Life**. And the dead were judged **according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books.

13. The **sea gave up the dead** who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

14. Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

This part of the vision starts out with the indescribable majesty of God. It staggers the imagination; how could the appearance of a being be so powerful that it destroys the cosmos!

Then a recurring theme throughout Scripture comes to the forefront; there are books that are opened. In fact, there are two kinds of books. The first is the ***records of our deeds***. And once again, this isn't a new concept. Daniel of the Old Testament talked about books that are opened (Dan 7:10). Ezra talks about the same thing (4 Ezra 6:20).

It's a simple concept; God is keeping tabs on the deeds of all humanity. The implication of the books is something we should take to heart. It explains a lot about God's justice and judgment. ***It is not so much that God is passing judgment as it is; each of us are writing our own judgment.***

The second is the ***Book of Life***. Once again, it is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. Moses speaks of it in Exodus 32:32. It is mentioned in Psalms 69:28, Isaiah talks about the names of the living written in it (Isa 4:3). And in the New Testament, Paul talks about his fellow-laborers being in it (Php 4:3).

The imagery is quite straight forward. Any nation or kingdom has a roll of those who are citizens. If you come back from an international trip, they will look up your name on a computer, and look at your passport. When you show up at customs you don't worry, *"I hope I'm a citizen. I tried to act like an American so I hope they let me in!"*

You have proof before you ever get there. You have a life and a passport with an official "seal" testifying to the fact; you are a citizen. They don't decide if you have citizenship when you show up at customs.

The concept of God's Kingdom is the same. ***Your citizenship is sealed in Jesus Christ.*** You and I are living in Christ right now, or we are not. It is not a question of how good you are; or how much you look and act like a Christian; it is a case of being alive in Christ, or not. But if you are alive, the evidence will show in your living. ***Now's the time to ask yourself, is there evidence I am alive, spiritually?***

Then there comes a statement, that in our modern thinking, we might just blow right over it, "***the sea gave up her dead.***" But it's a loaded statement to the readers of John's time.

First of all, it was ***extremely important to be buried*** in ancient times. It was believed that if a person was not properly buried, their spirit would be left to wander homeless between worlds; neither on earth or in heaven. If a person dies at sea, they cannot receive a proper burial, and the consequences are obvious. So the vision flies right in the face of this superstition. No one is out of the reach of God. No one or thing will escape judgment; good or bad, no matter what the circumstances or the status. In fact, not even Satan or the grave is out of reach.

QUESTIONS

DO YOU THINK THE CHURCH CULTURE OF TODAY EMPHASIZES THE MAJESTY OF GOD MORE OR LESS THAN PREVIOUS GENERATIONS? IN WHAT WAYS?

GOD USES THE IMAGERY OF TWO BOOKS; THE FIRST, OF DEEDS, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR CHRISTIANS?

THE BOOK OF LIFE GIVES AN IMAGE OF A SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE; WHAT PRINCIPLES WOULD YOU TAKE FROM THIS IMAGE?

Revelation 21

1. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also ***there was no more sea.***

Again, the sea is mentioned, this time it's gone. What's so inspirational about that? Let's go a little deeper into ancient thinking. Even though Judaism believed in the One True God, they were influenced by myths of the time. And one common myth was that the dragon of chaos, Tiamat, lived in the sea. In fact, the Hebrew word for waters means chaos.

Keep in mind, this was also before the invention of the compass. No one ventured too far out on a featureless sea. The sea could not be tamed or trusted.

And to top it off, in Jewish culture, dreams of the sea always meant hostility to God. So, at a number of levels, the sea was always the enemy. But in the new creation, **there will be no enemy**; there will be nothing to pull us from God. That is the imagery of the statement.

Rev.21:2

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

This statement comes from a **double background, Greek and Jewish**. Jewish thinking was influenced by Greek philosophy. For example, they knew of **Plato's idea of ideal forms**. That is to say; everything on earth has an ideal counterpart in heaven. The Jews were very aware that the earthly Jerusalem wasn't perfect, even if it was the center of God's people. And they were very aware it wasn't eternal. It was lost on a number of occasions. However, they always had faith in its restoration. And they always had faith that at the end of days, they would see **Jerusalem in its ideal form**.

That imagery and spiritual principle carries over to us in the New Testament. Now, we are God's temples, but **we aren't perfect, but we are called to always strive toward the ideal**. The hope is that one day we will have glorified bodies; that our natures and understanding will become the ideal. We will live in the ideal. But the journey to the ideal must start now; while we are in these flawed bodies and we live in imperfect circumstances. It is part of the refining process.

QUESTIONS

THE SEA REPRESENTS HOSTILITY AGAINST GOD; WHERE DO WE SEE HOSTILITY AND CHOAS IN OUR TIME? IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU IMAGINE IT GETTING WORSE?

THE IDEA OF THE NEW JERUSALEM IS AN IDEAL SPIRITUAL COUNTERPART TO WHAT EXISTS ON EARTH. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE "IDEAL CHRISTIAN?"

BY WHAT MEANS CAN WE STRIVE FOR THE IDEAL NOW?

3. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4. "And **God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.**"

The great hope is pain will pass totally out of existence. After a Sunday like last Sunday, that's hard to believe! We filled up nearly two rows of people with all kinds of immediate physical concerns. That will be a unique thing of the new heaven and earth. For all the worship that will be going on, there will never be another healing service.

That being said; I believe there will be one last great pain as the former things passed away; there will be the pain of ***what was left incomplete***; the *potential* that we never reached; the *lives that could have been touched* but weren't; those areas in our lives that *could have been so fruitful*, but remained unfulfilled; those times and opportunities we now realize, those were the things that *really mattered*. Before the tears are wiped away, I think it might be then we cry the hardest. ...***But the good news is; it is right now we could prevent that.***

5. Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6. And He said to me, "It is done! I am the **Alpha and the Omega**, the **Beginning and the End**. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

The words, "Alpha and Omega" lose their richness in the translation. We may know that Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and that it symbolizes *the beginning point*. But it is much more than that; it means the ***original source of all things***.

We may know that omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. And that it symbolizes *the end*. But it is much more than that; it refers to the ***destination or destiny of all things***. Everything has come from God, and everything *will* go back to God. *It is just a question of what happens when it does.* All of creation travels a great circle of accountability.

7. "He who overcomes **shall inherit all things**, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

8. "**But the cowardly**, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

We come back to the theme of the revelation that has been playing since the beginning: hang in there; endure; everything that you will go through, as bad as it may look now, is miniscule compared to what is coming.

Then we are told of the types of people ***bound for the second death***, and most of them make sense. But there is one worth a closer look; that is the ***cowardly***. We might think, why cowardly? A person is either brave or they are not.

But the revelation isn't simply talking about the presence of fear. In fact, real courage is facing one's fears. It is not a sin to be afraid, it is spiritual death to become enslaved by one's fears.

"Cowardly" is to be ***blessed with an insight into God, but not having the courage to live out what we know***. In short; this verse is talking about ***how we are living right now***.

Rev 22

4. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

5. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

In a sense, this is the end of the story, but the beginning of *real* life. The human race has gone full circle. In the beginning, Adam walked in the direct presence of God. But for thousands upon thousands of years man, fallen and imperfect, would die in the full and direct presence of God. Abraham, Moses, Paul; even the best of us can survive nothing more than an indirect glance. But at this time, the direct presence of God will become our natural state of existence.

QUESTIONS

REV 21:4 SPEAKS OF GOD WIPING AWAY TEARS AND SUFFERING; WHY DO WE HAVE THEM NOW?

IF SOMEONE ASKED YOU; HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THE TERM, "ALPHA AND OMEGA"?

REV 22:4 SPEAKS OF GOD'S NAME ON THEIR FOREHEADS, IS THAT SYMBOLIC OR LITERAL?

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STANDING IN THE DIRECT PRESENCE OF GOD?

CONCLUSION

It's only logical; talking about an unlimited God re-creating the universe is just too far from our everyday thinking. We can't even imagine the power involved in the first creation. ***So what does all of this mean to us in any practical way as we gather here today?***

I'd like to share two simple points, and we're done:

#1

Before any of the mega-events of Revelation are mentioned, it always starts with the ***majesty of God***. It continually drives home the idea: ***we had better not take the majesty of God too casually.***

I don't know about the rest of their theology, but that's one thing the Quakers had right. It was said that they had such reverence for God that when they came before Him in prayer, they would literally shake.

If we held even the ***smallest appreciation of the power that is God***; for the fact of how even, our next breath is the product of His will; there would be no boring worship, there would be no fear of our temporary situations; ***just awe of Him***.

For ***those who reject Him***, think long and hard before walking away; for those who ***profess Him***; let us wake up and move as if we are really alive in reality's ultimate power. But let ***no one take Him casually***, that is the worst of all.

#2

Even as days slide by in their ***ordinariness***; never forget, it is in such ordinary days, that we are writing our own eternities. Those are the days in the ***Books of Deeds***. ***You and I are writing our own judgments right now***.

Last week, Revelation challenged us with: ***What is the quality of our faith?***
-Because, right now we are writing the history of the church.

This week it is: ***What is the quality of our hope?*** - ***Because; right now, we are writing the history of our lives.***

So, here it is, the final question to take with you: ***Right now; what judgments are you and I writing for ourselves in eternity?***

QUESTIONS

GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW PEOPLE TAKING GOD CASUALLY.

IN WHAT WAY ARE WE WRITING OUR OWN JUDGMENT?