

Heaven

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 November 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Beth. Folks, let me invite you to turn to Revelation 21 and 22, which is where we're going to get to tonight as we think about this wonderful topic of heaven.

And it's been a joy to think about that this week, particularly on a week where Scotland qualified for a major tournament. It feels like the two have aligned. But I've been so excited to spend time here this week, and I hope this is going to thrill our hearts as we think about these two chapters.

As you're turning there, since this is my first time in the pulpit in about a month, let me just thank you as a church family just for your love and support to us as a family over the last couple of weeks as we've kind of welcomed baby Eve to our family.

We've just been touched by the messages of support and love and the practical help as well. So let me just thank you on behalf of Alex and I and I guess the girls as well for your love and support.

Why don't we pray as we come to this wonderful theme tonight? Isaiah chapter 66.

[1 : 08] But this is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

And so, Father, we don't want to just go through the motions this evening. Lord, you are the living God who delights to inhabit the praises of his people. And so, Father, we ask this evening that as we turn to think about things that in a certain way are well above our pay grade, well above our capacity to fathom, Lord, would you grant us knowledge and understanding?

Thank you that your son is the one who gives the spirit without measure. And so, Father, we are desperately in need of your help this evening. Help us to have the eyes and the affection for the glorious Jesus.

And we pray in his precious name. Amen. Amen. Well, folks, let me tell you about the car journeys that I've noticed don't go well for us as a family.

Right? Conversation goes something like this. The voice comes from the back seat. Daddy, Daddy, where are we going? Where are we going? And I respond and I say, honestly, sweetheart, I've got no idea.

[2 : 23] Right? I just get handed by your mom. I get handed these digits. I've just put into the sat-nav. I've got no idea where we're going. I've never been before. But all I know is that we will be there in approximately 46 minutes time.

Right? Conversation goes like that. Guaranteed in the back seat. A mood of frustration, boredom, and fighting. Right? Guaranteed. Let me flip it around for a minute.

And tell you about the most enjoyable car journeys that we have as a family. Right? Same scene plays out in front of us. Voice comes from the back. Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, where are we going?

And I'm straight on it. Right? I'm like, oh, kids, you will not believe where we are going. We are going to Dalkeith Country Park. Right? It's always a favorite. You've never been. Go. Okay? We're going to Dalkeith Country Park.

You are going to love it. I mean, there are slides. There is swings. There is tree houses. There's a flying fox. And maybe, maybe, maybe, even if you're good, there'll be an ice cream in that bargain for you as well.

[3 : 25] Which even in November in Scotland seems to never lose its appeal. Right? All of a sudden, the mood in the back of the car, frustration replaced with anticipation.

All of a sudden, the back of the car, boredom replaced with excitement. When are we getting there? When are we getting there? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Here's what I want to suggest tonight as we come to think about this topic.

That actually, the back seat of my car, on our car journeys, is a lot like the Christian life. Okay? Tonight, it's all about knowing where we're going.

Okay? If you want a phrase, just to remember. All about knowing where we're going. Right? Famous story told, apparently, that happened between J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis once upon a time.

Okay? Tolkien, who was a Christian at the time, turns to Lewis, who wasn't a Christian at the time, and says, Have you ever wondered why you love stories so much? Have you ever wondered why you love stories so much?

[4 : 30] Do you know why? Because you're in one. You see, that's what we encounter as we journey into the pages of Scripture. Right? We encounter a story.

Right? Right? Not just a story, but the story. Friends, the one that we are all caught up in by God's grace. And tonight, before we get to the end of the story, I want us to understand the story.

Right? And I've unashamedly nicked that from Jesus. Okay? Which seems to be a pretty good place to go if you're looking to copy stuff. Right? Nicked it from Jesus. So what he says, isn't it, to his two disciples, if you want to check out in your own time and look.

End of Luke, chapter 24. Journeying to me. Struggling to come to terms with what's happened. Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus is there with them.

He doesn't jump out from behind a bush and say, here I am. Surprise. Right? That's what I would have done. Flogged it to you being framed. 500 quid in the bank. That's what I would have done. Right?

[5 : 32] It's not what Jesus does. What does he do? He takes them on a journey through the Bible story. Right? And beginning, which is what we get in Luke. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

Right? Jesus wants them to get the story, how this is all about him. And so we're going to take the Jesus approach tonight to this topic as we think about this story.

And the story begins, friends, with this delightful gods who we're introduced to. This is who our God is. Right? This loving community of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Majestic. Holy. Powerful. Relational. Beautiful. Who creates the world, not because of anything that was lacking in him, but creates it as an extension, as an overflow of who he is.

This three-in-one community of love. And his desire, his eternal purpose, the title to the story, if you like. And remember this.

[6 : 44] His heart is to dwell among a people who he has made his own. Right? If you're scribbling stuff down tonight, scribble that one down. His desire to dwell among a people whom he has made his own.

His people enjoying him, reveling in him, glorifying him in his place, knowing his blessing and favor. This is who this God is.

Right? This is the God that we know. This is the God who we think about each day as we come to the scriptures. This is his word. It's a joy to know him. As we think about the story, friends, we're going to make five quick sightseeing stops as we jump on the tour bus of the Bible.

As we trace this theme. As it snowballs and as it gets increasingly more personal as we journey on. Right? Five pit stops. The last one's heaven, just to give you the game.

Okay? That's where we'll hang out for a little bit tonight. But let's get the story. Okay, the first stop in our tour of the Bible story is the garden. Right? God creates.

[7 : 50] This God creates. He speaks. And by his word, the heavens and the earth are formed. Right? And as the pinnacle of his creation, he creates human beings.

Adam and Eve. Human beings stamped with dignity. And he places them in Eden. Right? Right? This garden full of beauty.

Full of life. The light and provision are there. Adam and Eve have to cultivate it all under his loving rule. As they find their purpose. As they find their joy in him, friends.

Which is why we ever want to experience those things. We have to find them within the contours of knowing this God. And what we see here in Eden is this unhindered fellowship that exists between God and man.

In this perfect, unspoiled environment. As God walks in the garden. Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. Their sin is they eat from the tree.

[8 : 52] As they say, God not your way, my way. Sees them banished from the garden. Sees them banished from the presence of God himself. And that sin spreads to every human heart.

Friends, and the thing for us to see is that God has every reason to leave us in this predicament. Every reason. Mankind has given him every reason. But this God will not be deterred in his desire to fully and eternally dwell among a people who he has made his own.

Right? Nothing's going to put him off. Nothing's going to thwart him from accomplishing that purpose. And we move from a garden to the temple. Okay? You see, when God brings his people out of Egypt, the reason is not so that they can kind of run free in the playground.

Right? Bell goes ding, ding, ding, ding. You're out. Do what you want. It's not like that. God commands Moses to make an ark. Which was to be housed in this tented area called the tabernacle.

Why? So that he could live with his people. Right? It's the very thing, as you read the Old Testament, it's the very thing that defines who Israel are.

[10:04] Their God isn't in some distant place. Their God dwells with them. Right? And you get this from the location of the tabernacle. When the people stopped and camped, where was the tabernacle to be?

Right in the middle. Where are the people? Where are the 12 tribes? They're arranged round about it. Our God dwells with us. Right?

When the people went, get up and go, God goes with them. When the people settle down, stop, God settles down with them. When they enter the promised land, eventually the tabernacle becomes the temple.

The fixed place where God and man meet. The place where worship happens. The place where sacrifice happens.

Right? Because while God is among them, access to him is not free and unhindered like it was in the garden because of the sin barrier. But God makes a way, he makes a sacrificial system by which his people can approach him and know that they are right with him through sacrifice.

[11:11] Why? Because God desires to fully and eternally dwell among the people who he has made his own. And we move from the tabernacle.

Right? You see how we're racing through these? We're number three already. Right? We move from the tabernacle to the person. John writes this about Jesus in his prologue.

John chapter one. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Do you see the language? God's desire takes another gigantic step in the coming of Jesus.

Which is why Christmas, friends, is such a big deal. It's a huge deal. As God comes, as we celebrate, as we remember that. So God now inhabits space and time in the person of Jesus.

God now is a human being. Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the meeting place between God and man. Everything that the temple was pointing towards. Friends, never before has God dwelt more powerfully, more authentically and personally with mankind than in Jesus.

[12:14] Okay? And you get this in the bookends to Matthew's Gospel. I wonder if you've ever noticed this before in Matthew's Gospel. I haven't really noticed it until recently. Bookended with God's presence. Okay?

Starts by identifying Jesus as who? Emmanuel. God with us. His life, his death on the cross, in our place for our sin.

His physical resurrection proving that the price has been paid. Death and the claims of hell have been defeated by heaven's king as he claims as for himself.

And it ends with Jesus' promise that as you go and make disciples of all nations, I will be with you till the end of the age. Why?

Because of this God's desire, his heart, to fully and eternally dwell among a people whom he has made his own. Do you see how there's a snowball in here?

[13:14] And fourthly, we move from the Christ, from the person, to the church. That's where we kick in. Yeah? Paul would write this to the Corinthians.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?

Meaning, friends, that the moment that you and I put our faith in Jesus, as we find ourselves in him, the spirit of God comes to take up residence inside of us.

Get that. God lives in us. God lives in us. God lives in us. And that means to be a Christian is not simply to be somebody who believes religious things and acts in religious ways and makes different life choices to everyone else in the world.

It is to be somebody who knows the very life and love of the triune God. And collectively, which is how the New Testament always speaks about Christians, right?

It's the church. It's the plural you. To be the church is to be the very place where God dwells and where he builds us up together.

[14 : 25] The way he's wired us, as we use our gifts to serve one another, as we speak his word, speak the truth to one another, as we submit ourselves to it and are transformed by it, we are built up together as a place where God dwells.

Now, that is to say that the church is the nearest and dearest thing to God's heart. God no longer lives in a building. He lives inside his people.

Okay, think about it. What's the world saying to us right now? It's saying the way that you live determines who you are. And we've got to understand with Christianity, it's completely the other way around.

Because God pronounces in the gospel who you are as a Christian, who I've made you to be, that determines how you should live.

Right? See, it's the other way around. Not how you, yeah, you got it right. This is who we are, friends. This is who we are. You know, there's a famous story told of the queen mum who went in an outing one day, a visit, and she stepped out of the car and she opened the back door of the car where the children were sitting.

[15 : 37] And she simply said to them, now remember, children, royal children equals royal manners. Right? Royal children equals royal manners. And friends, when we think about our lives in terms of our holy calling as God's people, that is how we're to think about it.

When we think about holiness, when we think about living out this call that God has placed on our lives, we've got to understand that there's something else going on here as well. When you think about it, you get that wonderful promise from Jesus, don't we, that in John 14 to his disciples who are panicking.

Right? Jesus has just said, I'm going, and where I'm going, you cannot come. This wonderful promise in John 14 where he says, in my father's house, there are many rooms.

And if I go, I will come back and I am preparing a place for you. Right? He is going to prepare a place for them. But we need to understand as well when we're living out this holy calling that God is also preparing us for a place.

Okay? And perhaps having arrived at the subject of tonight, we'll maybe slow down at this point and think on that. Okay? I don't know if you've ever watched those whole makeover shows.

[16 : 51] I remember when we were young, we used to finish dinner and we used to run to the telly. And it was always Changing Rooms was on. Okay? With Handy Andy and we used to call her Carol, Smiley, Smiley, Smiley, Smiley.

Was it today? It's Homes Under the Hammer or something like that. You know these shows where somebody's bought something and the host comes in to interview them and says, what on earth did you see in that?

Why have you bought that? And they respond, well, listen, we've taken up ownership of this now. And this is ours. And we know where we're going with this place.

Right? We know what we're doing with this place. And slowly but surely, room by room, wall by wall, plug by plug, we will get there.

And friends, this is what happens when the Spirit moves into our lives. And as we begin to be transformed into the blueprint of Jesus, this is God's call on our lives.

[17 : 56] As we pursue Jesus Christ, that we will be transformed more into his image. He is preparing us for a place. Why?

Well, because of his desire to fully and eternally dwell among a people who he has made his own. And we are live at our fifth and final pit stop this evening.

Okay? On the tour, we move from the church to our final stop, which is the city. Now, it's worth saying here before we get to Revelation 21 and 22, that when we die, friends, that we have every confidence that we will be in the very presence of Jesus.

This is before new heavens and the new earth. Right now, when we die, before he comes, we will have every confidence, and we can have every confidence, that we will be in the very presence of Jesus.

Right? I'd go further and maybe tentatively say, not just spiritually, but physically. We will be with the Lord. We will know him. And the joy of knowing his presence.

[19 : 04] But here in Revelation 21, and I invite you to turn there now, is the new heavens and the new earth. Right? The book of Revelation, as you're turning there, written to Christians massively up against it.

Written to Christians wondering whether to keep on going for Jesus or not. Have you ever asked yourself that question? Do we keep on going? Is it worth it? Fearful for the future? And this is written to give them certainty.

Friends, in our world, where we are bombarded with uncertainty, as Pete mentioned earlier, we don't know what tomorrow will bring. In our world derived of hope, in our world where we can feel fearful as Christians about what tomorrow might bring, what might happen in the future.

This is written to assure us of the place that God has prepared for us. Okay? This is what we get. Revelation 21. Let's just read it together. Okay?

This is what John sees. 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.

[20 : 08] I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Friends, this is where the story is going.

It's a place, the new heavens and the new earth, a place, the city, defined by what's not there.

Okay? Do you notice it? There is no sea, which in the book of Revelation is always symbolic of evil, right?

Death is not there. Pain is not there. Tears are not there. Suffering is not there. Do you get a description in the reading that Beth read earlier from Isaiah, that there will be no longer a child who dies in infancy?

[21 : 26] Right? When Eve was born, I remember the bed right next to us, really bright light shining down. The baby next to us had extreme jaundice. Right? Doctors coming in and out all the time.

Couldn't get any sleep. Poor Alex coming in and out all the time. Updating on how the child was doing. Friends, that will not happen in the new creation. Okay? Doctors will be unemployed in the new creation.

Because those things belong to the old order. And sin is not here. Because when this king returns, he will banish it.

Right? All who have lived will be raised, summoned to give account to him. Because before him, every knee will bow. He will judge the thoughts of every human heart. And we have to understand that Jesus spoke about this when he was on earth.

He spoke about this more than any other thing. Right? Trying to get the people of his generation to understand it. Speaking in a way that they will understand. What do you say? At the end of the age, he will be like a shepherd who separates the sheep and the goats.

[22 : 31] He will be like a fisherman who separates the good fish and the bad fish. That place that he speaks about of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, I don't know exactly what that means.

But it doesn't sound like a place that I want to be. Or I want any of those who I love and rub shoulders with every day to go. But friends, we need to take Jesus at his words. That eternal punishment is real.

For all those who have persisted in their rebellion against this holy God. If you're struggling with that, and I take it there's a certain amount of gravity that comes with that.

And soberness. That if you're struggling with that, remember that these are the words coming from the mouth of the most loving person. Who has ever walked this earth. And of course, this is a place where God desires none to go.

He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But desires that all would turn to him in repentance and have life. And I take it as we think about this really briefly tonight.

[23 : 33] That we are to reflect something of God's heart for the lost world. And I think deep down this makes sense. I spent 10 days in Mozambique when I was a student.

Loved that country. I've been praying for it ever since. I was moved to tears when I read about the 50 plus people who were beheaded this week by ISIS members. Did you read that in the news this week?

Just people taking advantage of extreme poverty and seeking to recruit people for a religious cause. Or maybe that nurse that was found guilty of murdering eight babies this week.

What do you do with that stuff? You know, it's utterly heartbreaking. But I take it that the news that one day this perfect king will have the last say, the final say, the perfect say on every wrong should greatly comfort us.

And it's good news. Right? Because light cannot be light if darkness still exists. Think about it this way as well. Think about our best loved stories. Why is it that they always have this kind of repeated theme?

[24 : 39] Right? That we get that there cannot be peace on Middle Earth until Sauron is defeated. Yeah? We get that there can't be peace in the Pride Lands until Simba kills Scar.

We get it that there cannot be peace. Snow White cannot marry the prince until the wicked witch is killed. Right? We get that Aslan can't rule until the white witch is banished.

Right? Every single one of those stories would be very different. And we would hate it if it wasn't like that. These words of Aslan. Wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight.

At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more. When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death. And when he shakes his mane, we will have spring again.

This is our king. This is Jesus. Do you notice that there's no temple in this city? Right? This whole city, if you read on, is a cube. The only other cube in the Bible is the Holy of Holies in the temple.

[25 : 41] Right? The very place, the very place where God dwelt. And it's as if you like this, this whole city is now the Holy of Holies. God is fully everywhere. Right?

And there are no gates to this city. Right? The Romans used to talk about this thing that they got, actually, didn't they? They got Pax Romana. That's what they used to talk about.

That when their rule would establish peace and tranquility throughout the empire. Right? So imagine what it's a bit like when you hear maybe an older generation talk about how in their day, nobody on their street used to lock their doors.

Right? Because it was safe. You could leave stuff out. You could leave your door open. We were in and out. Hey. Just cannot even fathom that today. Can you? The place where peace reigns.

And it reigns because in this city, because the king rules, there is no threat. Friends, here is a place defined by what's not there. And here is a place, and we've got to see this, defined by what is there.

[26 : 43] Okay? Beauty is there. You read on in Revelation 21, the walls of the city coated with every kind of precious drill. The streets of this city are pure gold.

If you read on into chapter 22, there is a river bright as crystal flowing. The tree of life is there bearing fruit, the fruit which is for the healing of the nations. This is a deliberate echo of the Garden of Eden, except because Christ, the true and better Adam, rules.

This is almost like Eden amplified. And where we will reign with him and our physical resurrection bodies, which are patterned on his, you know, so once we bore the image of the man of dust, so now we will bear the image of the man of heaven.

Friends, there will be work to do in the new creation that we will love and we will do for God's glory, enjoying him forever. Beauty is there, friends, because the king is there.

Jesus, the victorious lamb who was slain and the roaring lion, except here, do you notice, he is the groom. And his people are the bride.

[27 : 59] There's people who we get through revelation who are from every tribe, every tongue and every nation. This group of people whose hearts beat for the very presence of the king, who love the king because they have been loved by the king and they have been blood bought and transformed by this king.

And to quote the late Willie Still, who was the minister in Glasgow at the Tron, the church is the bride, speaks of the climax of the greatest love affair in the world. That is the love of God for his people.

Friends, what makes heaven, heaven, and I think we need to see this as we close, is being in the very presence of the source of true joy, of the fountainheads of the lights, of the giver of life, of God himself.

It's him, isn't it, our hearts long for? It's not just a place, it's him. And it's Christ that makes heaven, heaven. Oh, to be with him, the one who loved us, the one who gave himself for us and who has given his spirit to be the inheritance in our hearts.

You know, D.L. Moody, the great American evangelist, wrote this soon before his death. He said, someday soon you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody is dead, but don't believe a word of it because at that moment I shall be more alive than I am now.

[29 : 26] Friends, you know why we love stories so much? Because we're in one. You know, that same conversation that took place between Lewis and Tolkien, do you know what Tolkien called Jesus?

He called him the true myth. Friends, knowing where we're going, anticipating it, being excited by it, particularly on the journey, makes all the difference.

You know, Pete's going to come and lead us in prayer in a minute, but I just want to close with the words of Colossians 3, verse 1, that the apostle Paul would write. I'm just going to have a bit of silence.

I realize there's been a lot that we've covered tonight, and maybe there's a lot in your heart as well as you come to think about these things. But let me just read Colossians 3, verse 1.

And this is what Paul writes. Since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[30 : 37] Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. So let me just take a moment of silence, friends, and then I'll close us in a short prayer.

And so, Father, help us fix our minds on the things above, where Christ is. Father, we love him. We thank you for the life that we have in him.

Father, I pray that we would know something more of what it is to know him this week. Father, he is the jewel and the crown of our faith. And so, Lord, it's our desire that he would be honoured and glorified, and that we would experience his love in new ways this week.

And so, Father, we pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.